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Painting Circles:
A Novel

Anastasia Fragoulis

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
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ABSTRACT

Painting Circles

Anastasia Fragoulis

Painting Circles is a novel-length manuscript in seven sections. It tells the story of Ariadne, a young Greek-Canadian woman who returns to her homeland to live out her fate, which is related to that of her mythological namesake. In Athens she falls obsessively in love with Yannis, a musician and junkie, her addiction to him mirroring his own to heroin. After the gravest of his betrayals, she takes a job in a jazz bar on the fictional island of Nysas. The interplay between the mythological character (Ariadne of Crete) and her modern day counterpart (Ariadne of Montreal) is central to the novel, as it allows for an exploration of the archetypal, or essential, stories upon which we consciously or unconsciously model our lives (though Painting Circles is not a strict allegory, the similarities between the myth and the novel's story are evident). Only through will can the contemporary Ariadne break out of the predetermined and well-trodden path laid out for her by myth. The novel also reveals, through the contemporary character, the aftermath of the mythological character's abandonment. In myth, Ariadne's story always ends on the beach in Naxos where the hero, Theseus, left her. In Painting Circles, both Ariadnes' stories begin on that deserted beach.

PROLOGUE

Dearest Mother,

I do not know if this letter will ever reach you, but I pray. Your worst fears have come true. I have been abandoned on a faraway isle, a miserable place devoid of innocence or purity, rife with depravity. The sun rises and sets as in any other land, but during the hours between its journeys, the horrors my eyes have beheld and the tide of scum that laps upon its white and sandy shores, of these things a daughter can never speak to a mother. It would pain you too much to see where I have landed, how I live, what I am becoming.

"If you help me, I will love you forever," he promised, and I emptied myself before him, showed him the dark, serpentine path into our deepest secret. I forsook everything, mother, I betrayed even you.

He was so smooth and cunning that despite your wisdom and your knowledge of the prophecies, you too were taken in by his smile, the ingenuousness of his avowals. He asked for my hand, then burned down my house so I would have nowhere to return, so I could never leave him. And all this with your blessing. What fools we became under the spell of the shrewd Athenian with his blonde bearded face and his airs of nobility.

The oracles warned me that I was too young to leave Crete. The crows, they said, will pluck out the eyes of the innocent like jewels. I plugged my ears to everything that went against him. I followed him blindly, faithfully. How I loved him, Mother. More than my own self.

As his men carried my palanquin to his ship, the acrid clouds from the burning palace turned the noon sky black and my eyes teared both from grief and from the smoke. The screams of our countrymen pierced the Tyrian purple drapes that hung around me, sheltering me from the sight of our destroyed kingdom, and I plugged my ears against their cries with silk torn from my skirts. Just before reaching the ship, a wrinkled claw penetrated the drapes and

dropped a small leather pouch filled with white powder into my lap. The inscrutable face of Efosini the seer followed with its hooked nose and hazy eyes.

"Take this to forget, my child," she said. "The most you can hope for now is to forget," and then she withdrew. I called after her to ask what she meant, but she had already disappeared into the smoke and chaos outside.

The journey was rough and comfortless, the waters surrounding our home wild with rage, lashing the ship's sides in vengeance for the heinous acts committed with my help on our shores. I could not tell you how far we travelled because when I wasn't weeping, homesick and regretting my impetuosity, I was unconscious, the reeling of the ship and the implacable nausea rendering me near-dead. But when I spotted land, our destination in the distance, whatever regrets I bore with me I tossed into the sea and watched them sink beneath the foreign, calm waters. He and I stood on deck, bathed in the violent red-orange of the sunset as the unknown land approached us in greeting, and I put my hand to my heart to make sure it was still beating.

The shoreline was deserted, the white sand smooth and velvety, as if no person before us had ever set foot upon it. He entered my palanquin as it was carried ashore, and behind the purple drapes we whispered eternal vows to each other, not wanting to disturb the peace of this magnificent, sacred place. I climbed out before him, both ecstatic and terrified, and for the first time my bare feet touched sand. What a sensation to finally feel the ground beneath you! I danced circles around him, singing old Cretan love songs reserved for the gods, replacing Zeus', Poseidon's and Dionysus' names with his. (Had I only known, Mother, the extent of my fate.) He caressed my neck and the tops of my breasts, his fingertips barely touching my skin, then ordered his men to scout the area for food and shelter. The men soon returned in high spirits bearing jugs of wine and baskets of fruit. They reported that we had landed on the king's great feast day, and we were to be honoured guests at the royal celebration. Despite my protests, my love carried me in his arms to the other side of the island, and I drank wine and danced with the

handsome young king until I collapsed from happiness and exhaustion. After that I remember no more. My love must have carried me back to the place where we'd first arrived, and my body recalls the sweet press of his flesh against mine, his warm breath on my neck, the taste of blood and honey on my lips.

In the morning—oh cursed morning!— when I awoke he was gone. At first I didn't believe even though the ship was nowhere in sight, but as the day passed and the question ceased to be, I lay there crumpled in the sand, weeping and tearing at my breasts until they bled. I cried out to him not to leave me for the wretched vultures, for I would surely die without him right here on this very spot where I had been forsaken. The wind began to blow and soon I was dusted with fine white sand. I willed it to fill my ears, my eyes, my mouth, every orifice, to block out the pain. I wished to be buried alive. The sky became more and more distant as I sank into the sand. It was then that I remembered the small sack tied to my waist, filled with the mysterious potion of forgetfulness that Efosini had given me upon my departure. I took the bitter potion and it brought me the dreamless sleep of the dead. When I awoke next, I had forgotten, but cruel fate, not everything. I expected to find him lying next to me, his arm wrapped around my waist, his head nestled in the hollow between my chin and shoulder. As I turned to kiss him, to caress the fine hair from his tender, sleeping face, remembrance seized me and I screamed as if my heart had been gored with the horn of a bull. I quickly swallowed the rest of the bitter powder, not wanting to ever wake up again.

I do not know how many days I slept, but when I awoke I was dazed, hungry, and surrounded. I was caged in like an animal by barbarians who grabbed at my hair, my body while others stood around watching, hissing, mocking and cheering. I recognized no one from the feast and everyone spoke quickly in a tongue that I had never heard before, screeching and spitting like owls. I tried to pick myself up, to run away from this vulgar herd, but my legs were like stone and the lights of the town were so far up in the hills that I knew I could never hope to reach them, weak as I was. I threw myself in the sea instead, amidst blue, swollen

corpses with smiles on their faces, and black, empty eye sockets trained towards the firmament. The salt water stung my torn breast, and I prayed for death, for the sea to take my body and swallow it. I wanted this more than I had ever wanted anything before. I wanted so badly to erase everything, even that I had been born.

But such was not my fate. Poseidon Earthshaker caught me in his nets and carried me back to shore, telling me that I had not yet been called. That I had been brought to this island for a reason, and it was an affront to the gods to deny them their due. He then laid me down on the same spot where I had been abandoned and violated me. As he breathed his wet and heavy breath into my ear, all I could hear was the voice of the one who condemned me to these depraved shores whispering, "I love you," in the crashing waves. And fool that I am, I still believed him and called out his name as the fishy god scaled my body, entering it brutally from the back and the front, tearing my insides, filling me with the entire sea, with all its creatures and vegetation, then leaving me bloated and lifeless on the shore.

The rabble yelled and jeered, wagging their strange tongues at me, split down the middle like those of serpents. They lifted me above their heads and carried me up the steep hill like a calf to be sacrificed to whatever fallen god reigned in this abominable place. Upon reaching the village I was entombed in a cave whose walls weep poisonous waters. The noise in the cave is wretched, incessant—I have even come to hear it in my sleep. Every night men enter the cave on their knees and lick the walls. All but a few go mad, dashing themselves against the walls and each other, then running out howling obscenities and throwing themselves off cliffs into the sea. I know these stories I tell sound like the ravings of a madwoman, but I assure you, Mother, all I say is as it is.

I am a slave here, no longer your princess. They laugh at what they call my pretenses of grandeur, my vanities, and they mock my Cretan accent. In the beginning I tried with all my being to make it livable here, to keep myself pure, but it has proven a fool's labour. You

cannot plant a fig tree in a desert, you once told me, and I did not believe you then—I saw it as a matter of will. I see now that you spoke the truth.

I still harbour the hope that he will come back for me, restore me in his heart, in the world and that I will once again be happy and complete. But as the days pass and I receive no word, no sign from the goddess who has abandoned me to my misery, my hope wanes and I weep bitterly, my own tears eating my flesh away. I am getting tired and old. The blush of my youth has turned sallow in the darkness of the cave. I have taken many lovers, 5, 10, 20, 1000, I have lost count. I feel nothing when they enter me, I just give myself to them to pass the endless time, though I know it spoils me, soils me for him and that my own weakness and filth condemn me to forever walk this damned place as a shadow. For that is what I believe, that I am dead and have been cast mercilessly into Tartarus.

Only a hero's gesture could save me now, lift me with strong and determined arms out of this underworld, carry me past the vipers and the mutant hounds that guard the diamond gates. But I no longer believe in heroes. Theseus was my hero and now he is gone and I despair that I will never leave this place, that it is my destiny, my fate inscribed in sheets of rock on Olympus before I was even born. Perhaps it is some punishment pre-ordained, Mother, for something you have done.

*Your ill-fated child,
Ariadne of Crete
Daughter of Minos.*

Section I

1.

The small wooden kiosk rises into the clouds, the magazines and newspapers skirting its sides flapping frantically like so many colourful wings and dropping letters from their pages like hail. Up, up, up into the grey Athenian sky, the kiosk spins as if on the lip of a cyclone, carrying a desperate young woman attached umbilically by a phone cord, the green receiver pressed to her ear. She is being whirled as if she were no heavier than a rubber ball at the end of a string wound around the finger of a playful god, whirling, whirling, whirling above the ground, leaving the ragged old man, keeper of the kiosk, exposed to spit-balls of rain and to letter-droppings, which explode on the dirty sidewalk around him. If there were an interested observer in the supermarket's deserted parking lot across the street, the spectacle would look like something out of a Saturday morning cartoon instead of a Monday afternoon tragedy.

The ragged old man slouching on a squat wooden stool does not notice that his kiosk has taken flight (or, more likely, has been plucked from its foundations by some mysterious hand) until a passing car splashes him with rainbow-streaked water that extinguishes his cigarette. Only then does he look towards the grey sky, his catartic eyes blinking against the rain, up the billowing skirts of the young whirling woman, and at his soaring kiosk, which pierces the rain clouds like a needle. He wonders out loud which of the gods have cursed him. He hadn't immediately recognized the young woman who thrust her ring-heavy hand into the kiosk's small window, and dropped a five drachma coin into his lap moments before this ill wind blew over him. The coin fell on the floor, rolled under a low shelf and settled among cobwebs, cigarette butts and dirt. But now, as he crosses himself furiously and stares up at her dangling feet, he recalls

who she is. He had seen her numerous times during the winter, rushing by to catch the yellow trolley that runs along Venizelou Avenue, sometimes stopping in mid-flight to make a phone call, and he's already determined she is *katarameni*—damned. Last time she brought the rain with her, and now this added misfortune. He shakes his head in consternation, not understanding how he's become entangled in her fate.

The old man grabs a passerby by the arm and points at the sky, tells her in his over-loud voice that his kiosk has flown away, can she see it, up there, "*Sta sinefa*?" The woman shakes her arm free, scowls at him and yells back, "*Trellathikes, pappou? Pouli iné*.—Have you lost your mind, granddad? It's a bird." She picks up the five drachma coin that lies at his feet, puts it in his hand and advises him to go home because Nereides play tricks on *pappouδες* at this time of day. The ragged old man decides he is dreaming, napping on his feet while everyone else is eating lunch and sinking into siesta. He takes his place on the wooden stool again, closes his eyes and waits to wake up.

Up in the grey clouds the young whirling woman counts the white birds that circle her while she waits for someone to pick up the phone on the other side of Athens. With each double ring, more like the insistence of a rude alarm clock than the ringing of a phone, she becomes weaker, dizzier, and she fans herself with a black business card until a renegade wind snatches it from her hand. The card floats down towards the ragged old man on his wooden stool and lands in a puddle by his feet. "No Problem," the card's drunken, white type declares. But the old man, lost in his somnambulance, does not notice the card, and even if he had, he would not be able to read the drunken type or chuckle at its irony because it is set in English.

"*Embros*?" The crisp and lofty voice travels across the skies from the other side of Athens, scattering the flock of circling birds, then pushing past the young woman's popping ears where it gets trapped inside the canal, relentlessly striking her tympanum like tribal drums.

"This is Ariadne Hatzidakis," the young woman yells into the receiver to hear herself over the drumbeats, the birds and the whistling wind, the clouds inhaling her echo. "We met last fall, on the island, on Nysas..." She stifles a sob, which then begins to strangle her. She opens her mouth and tries to swallow the whistling wind. "Last fall..." she repeats breathlessly, "when I was still alive." And the kiosk begins to plummet, straight down, down, down towards the oblivious, ragged old man on his wooden stool, as if suddenly released by careless or bored fingers, the magazine wings flapping wildly and uselessly, and Ariadne still hanging on to the receiver, trailing behind the shack like an unopened parachute, her last words spelled out in the sky by her flailing legs.

"What a coincidence," Aliko replies casually from the other side of Athens, pretending to remember Ariadne. "We're just packing to leave for Nysas, the season is about to begin. If you come to my house immediately, maybe we can work something out."

Ariadne jumps on the downtown trolley, and crumples into the first seat by the door. She presses her cheek against the cool window and stares glassy-eyed through the waves of exhaust at the rain-soaked young boys on motorbikes weaving fearlessly in and out of mid-day traffic, their drenched but confident girlfriends attached to their backs like barnacles. Just before the trolley passes the apartment building where he lives, Ariadne buries her face in her lap, assuming the position recommended for passengers on a plane that's going down, afraid that she might spot him out of the corner of her eye and crash. She doesn't raise her head again until she reaches her destination.

Ariadne sleepwalks the cobbled streets of Plaka, the oldest and most charming section of Athens, pushes open a wrought-iron gate and rings the sonorous bell of a stone mansion well-hidden from the road by a tall fence laced with budding vines. A statuesque young woman on her way out recognizes Ariadne from a neighbourhood pub, has seen her there several times with that musician everyone is always gossiping about.

She tries to catch her eye, but Ariadne doesn't notice her; as if hypnotized, she focuses on nothing but the front door held open by a woman she almost recognizes as Alik.

Within fifteen minutes of her arrival Ariadne is hired for the season and Alik introduces her to a large, bearded man named Thanasis, who shakes her hand firmly and tells her they will expect her on the island in three days. She will begin by working in Thanasis' jazz bar, The Scat Club, Alik quickly explains, her eyes shifting back and forth in their sockets and avoiding Thanasis' gaze. But maybe, later on, she can move upstairs to the No Problem. Alik and Thanasis smile automatically at her. Ariadne forces a smile back. She hates jazz.

Ariadne promises to be there, and then asks her new employers whether they are married. They both laugh uncomfortably just as a pretty young woman walks into the room, a baby wrapped around her side like a growth.

"This is my wife, Soula." Thanasis beams as he introduces her. "Alik is her older sister." Alik's mouth squinches up uncomfortably and she excuses herself.

Ariadne shakes Soula's hand, and then pats the baby's head. She is not that interested in babies, but she knows that appreciation of the employer's offspring will win favour with Soula that will hopefully rub off on Thanasis. She doesn't know this consciously, for she is too distracted for consciousness. Something inside her, dead as she feels, has taken over her actions.

2.

Ariadne's first room on Nysas is a wine cellar under Thanasis' house. The free accommodations that come with the job at The Scat amount to a small, dank room with two single mattresses on metal frames, one window, and no toilet. She is to use his family's bathroom upstairs, Thanasis has told her, but must supply her own paper and soap. Ariadne unquestioningly accepts this predicament as her fate, and trudges up to

the bathroom to wait her turn behind Thanasis, Alikí and Soula, often giving up her place in the line-up to her new employers, no matter how badly she has to go. Her roommate, Karina, takes to balancing her ample butt over the room's small sink to piss, using plastic bags for more complex evacuations then depositing them in the trash can on Thanasis' expansive terrace. It takes Ariadne only a day or two to follow suit.

Thanasis immediately blames the ragged tourists who make their way past his house toward the island's only hostel for the odoriferous deposit. "*Gourounia!*—Pigs!" he yells down at them as they march up the narrow stone path, single file, crouching under the weight of bursting backpacks hung with sneakers, rusted pans and watering cans like a hobo's Christmas tree. The tourists, mildly seasick from the twelve hour journey from Athens to Nysas over rough seas, ignore him. They have already encountered plenty of ranting Greeks on their travels and have learned not to take the national pastime personally. Ariadne and Karina smirk at the newcomers who parade past the wine cellar, diligently following the geometric patterns whitewashed onto the grey stone path—a leftover island habit from the days when donkeys were the most frequent passersby, the white lines directing their clumsy hoofs, providing them with a choreography—left, right, forward, back—like black footprints on the floor of a dance studio.

The girls settle into a routine quickly, becoming intimately acquainted with each other's habits, sounds and smells. During the day they go to Anthemusa, the island's main beach, well-bundled against the crisp, spring winds. From the sheltered terrace of the Way Out Café, they laugh as they watch the eager, early tourists frolicking in the still-cool sea, shivering and pretending to be warm. They sip the Way Out's lukewarm coffee all afternoon and chat with other "Perms," people who will be staying on Nysas and working the entire season. The veterans give them the low-down on Thanasis and Alikí, the less charitable postulating that the former fucks the latter doggy-style once a month behind the bar of the No Problem to keep her in line, the rumour having long ago been accepted as fact on the island.

In the evenings the girls are lectured on the methods and madness of their respective jobs in preparation for opening night. Ariadne memorizes the names, prices and ingredients of all The Scat's cocktails, and rattles them off— Catcall ,French Kiss, Foreplay, Orgasm—while Thanasis stares disinterestedly, waiting for her to make a mistake. He then rolls his eyes, shakes his head, and demands she start over until Ariadne bursts into tears. Karina folds hundreds of cheap T-shirts stamped with The Scat's or the No Problem's logos—which she will be selling in a gift shop attached to the two establishments—while Alik, dissatisfied with Karina's method, unfolds most of the shirts and throws them back onto the bottomless pile.

Within the confines of the small room, Ariadne learns that Karina has never been in love and that she fakes her orgasms by laughing out loud. The laugh becomes the secret signal to Ariadne, waiting out on the stoop, that in a few minutes that night's bumbler will be pushed out the front door and it will be safe to come in. And Karina figures out that her roommate's crying jags in the middle of the night are real and it is best not to ask about them or the neighbourhood bar in Athens where she first saw Ariadne. When she brings up the subject on the third morning of their stay, Ariadne looks at Karina with contempt, as if she has caught her eavesdropping on her dreams.

Ariadne and Karina live in the musty wine cellar for about a week, until Karina, less concerned with consequences than Ariadne, warns Thanasis that if proper accommodations are not found soon, his only two employees will quit before he even has a chance to open for the season. Ariadne stares at her feet during the exchange. Normally she is the last one to back away from a skirmish, but she has no desire or energy to look for a new job and just wants to hide out in the wine cellar until everything is calm again.

"We are not bottles of wine," is Karina's closing argument, as she crosses her arms over her massive chest, challenging Thanasis to contradict her.

Thanasis rents a two-room flat for the girls in the house of Kyr Georgis, the town's goat herder: a man who, the villagers inform Ariadne and Karina, has a problem with his eye. It wanders. Especially when his female tenants are taking showers in the dingy bathroom—situated at the end of the balcony—which they share with Kyr Georgis and his oppressed daughter, Fofo.

After hauling their luggage up to the second floor flat, Karina declares their new home a dump, while Ariadne prefers to think of it as basic, reminding Karina that it is a vast improvement on the wine cellar. The flat's front door opens into a small, rectangular room, which is furnished with a single mattress on a metal frame. A second set of doors leads to a second room, much larger and square, though equally drab, with three single beds, and a window too high up to reach. Ariadne chooses the smaller room, assuming it will afford her more privacy once the other employees start arriving. Karina spreads herself around the larger room comfortably, assuming that it will remain hers even if someone else eventually occupies one of the empty beds.

The flat's only luxury is its view. Ariadne spends her first afternoon and evening sitting on the balcony, staring at a series of mountains that enclose the port, sheltering it from the wind. Rocky and covered with brush, she can make out four or five separate hills, one behind the other, holding the turquoise sea captive in their muscular embrace. The furthest hill looks like a shadow in the afternoon sun, the aura of a daydream fading in the eyes of the dreamer. By nightfall, she is mesmerized by the ships that glide into port through a narrow opening between the hills. They are festooned with bright lights and enter and exit like floating carnivals, momentarily cracking the water's black smoothness. From inside, Karina calls Ariadne's name several times, and finally has to shake her by the shoulder when it is time for dinner.

There are, of course, consequences when you feel free enough to yell at your *patron*. Shortly after moving into Kyr Georgis' house, and after all the cheap, multi-

coloured T-shirts have been folded, Karina is asked to leave. Emboldened by the success of getting the apartment out of Thanasis, Karina thought she might put a few other things in order. She demanded that Thanasis pay her more than they had agreed upon in Athens for minding his store—including a percentage of her sales—and that he grant her a day off at least once a week. As she made her case, she crossed her arms over her chest, repeating the posture that had worked for her just a few days earlier. When Thanasis refused to submit, she called him a tyrant and a slave-driver, and threatened to report him to the labour authorities. But there are no labour authorities on Nysas, and this time Thanasis got the last word: "Oxo!"

"Maybe you shouldn't have asked for the day off," Ariadne gently suggests when Karina comes home infuriated. She is sad to see her new friend go so soon, and almost offers to speak to Thanasis, but then changes her mind. What would she debate? A day off, the veterans have assured her, is an unknown quantity on Nysas. Days off are for tourists, not for employees. During the six month season, everyone is expected to work seven days a week—it is the island's unwritten law, agreed upon before the season begins.

"Didn't they tell you when they hired you, Karina?"

Everyone will have six months to rest after the last tourist tosses her last worthless drachma into the sea as an offering to the gods before returning to Sweden, France, or wherever the endless supply of tourists comes from, she tells Karina, parroting more wisdom she's picked up from the veterans. This is to be their consolation. Ariadne is more than relieved that she'll be kept so thoroughly occupied for the next six months, distracted her from her woes, though she does not say this to Karina, who is in no mood for anyone else's problems.

Karina curses as she re-packs the belongings she had just days ago placed so thoughtfully in a pile on the floor next to her single bed. "*Malaka!*" Wanker. "*Malaka!*"

Asshole. "*Malaka!*" Fag. She spits the words out staccato as each item of clothing is thrown into her green vinyl suitcase. It takes both Ariadne and Karina to carry the suitcase, as massive as its owner, down the stairs to Kyr Georgis' second guest apartment, which has wintered as the repository for their landlord's own brand of goat cheese, the sour odour still lingering in the room's whitewashed walls.

Though he is happy to have rented out the second apartment so soon, it will be harder for Kyr Georgis to get a peek at Karina as she emerges from the downstairs bathroom. His excuse will not be as simple. Upstairs, he always claimed to be watching the sea as he stood outside the bathroom door and leaned over the balcony's railing. He'd wanted to be a seaman and not a goatherd, he explained one morning as Ariadne wrapped the towel tighter around her torso. But his family had goats, not boats. "So there you have it," he shrugged as she escaped into her room, slamming the door behind her and drawing the curtains.

Kyr Georgis tries loitering outside the downstairs bathroom whenever he hears the water running and the old pipes groaning. He stands there whistling as if he is waiting for his donkey to come by and pick him up for a night on the town, instead of waiting for Karina to burst out of the dark room, wet and naked, ready to smother him with her bountiful flesh .

3.

Karina's old room, in what Ariadne takes to calling her apartment, does not remain vacant for long. The Scat Club's second employee, a Greek-Australian named Petros, arrives just in time to help open up, but not soon enough to help Ariadne sweep the winter's spider webs off the bar's ceiling. Despite his Australian twang, Petros looks as Greek as any of the village men who have never set foot off the island, except to fish or escape their wives in their small, painted caiques. With his dark curly hair, fleshy

round face and olive complexion, Petros is exactly the type of male presence The Scat Club needs. Thanasis has been in the business a long time and knows what women seeking Orgasms want when they come to Greece. Kyr Georgis is also happy to see a man moving into the upstairs apartment, someone he can relate to and gripe to about the girls.

"Those sluts have only been here a week and they've already brought home two different *malakes* each," Kyr Georgis complains to Petros, clicking his tongue in derision. Petros nods in that typical Greek male way, head slightly tilting to the side, moving up and down slowly as if to say, "I understand. Life is like that. What can you do?" The nod is genetic, passed down through generations of Greek men. It reveals a heaviness of the soul, too much experience, and a surrender to fate. Even in distant Australia, Petros has not escaped the legacy of the nod. Kyr Georgis nods back at him.

On the walk to The Scat, Ariadne fills Petros in on what has been done at the bar before his arrival, how the tasks have been divvied up. Specific duties have not yet been assigned by Thanasis, but Ariadne takes the opportunity to excuse herself from the tasks she finds most abhorrent. She will explain to Thanasis later that she and Petros have worked it out between themselves.

"I empty and fill the ice cube trays in the morning, you refill the bottles of booze."

"Refill the bottles?"

"All the booze is fake. I sweep the front room, you clean the bathroom."

"Why do I have to clean the bathroom?"

"Because I got here first. I wash the glasses, and you take out the trash. We both paint the floor."

"Paint the floor?"

"Every night before we leave we paint the floor. Don't ask. You'll see what I mean."

The Scat Club is a cool, dark cave which, in the days before tourists discovered the small island and its magnificent beach, served as a stable, its front door still opening up in the four panels that once allowed animals to stick their heads out for a breath of the island's hot and fragrant air. The Scat's walls are adorned with contemporary Greek art: large black and white line drawings of cartoonish men sitting on rush-bottomed chairs, staring forlornly out of the canvas as wax drips onto tablecloths.

Opening night does not turn out to be the civilized event that Ariadne has prepared herself for, having imagined those who indulged in jazz to be a subdued group of hummers and finger snappers. True, the tablecloths are clean and freshly pressed in honour of the new season, the brass candleholders shiny and free of fingerprints and cigarette butts stuck in waxy overrun, and the atmosphere is light and amicable as the island's other bar owners drop in for a good luck handshake and a free drink. But this is only the first hour.

As a few legitimate customers trickle in, filling the inner room of the bar where the drinks are mixed and the music cued, then the outer narrow room by the front door, Ariadne discovers that Thanasis' fly eyes can spot a dripping candle in the farthest corner of the bar while he is selecting music, chatting up customers and shaking frothy cocktails. "Candles!" he bellows above the heads of his drunken customers as if he were making his final statement for the prosecution at a murder trial where Ariadne is the accused. Everyone in the bar turns around to look at the condemned employee before she is dragged away and beheaded. Ariadne's eyes flit from table to table until she spots the incriminating evidence. She quickly scrapes the wax off the checkered tablecloth with her nails, letting the hot liquid in the center of the spill fill the crevices of her fingerprints so that she will no longer leave behind any traces. Some customers, too drunk to care about tablecloths or capital punishment, make a game of tilting their candlesticks so that Ariadne will run over to their table, nervous and apologetic. Petros,

who seems unconcerned about dripping candle wax and Thanasis' howling, just shrugs and continues to serve drinks, charming a group of Irish girls with his obscure, Greek-Australian ways.

By eleven o'clock the bar is packed: people standing in the narrow walkway between the two rooms, others squeezed around the low tables on short, rush-bottomed stools talking and laughing, the most boisterous leaning on the bar, singing drunken songs from their homelands and toasting Thanasis' Scat Club as the finest jazz joint on the deep blue sea. Thanasis, caught up in his customers' drunken revelry, stops mixing drinks and comes out to the other side of the bar to sit with his new-found friends. This is how Thanasis gets them to stay until closing and drink, gets them to come back night after night while they are on Nysas, rejecting all other drinking holes. He becomes their drinking buddy, though his own libations are poured from the only good bottle stashed behind an icon of the blessed Virgin. He drinks to her health a few times a night, raising his glass towards her beatific face, crossing himself solemnly as he bows his head and chants faked psalms in Greek. The customers, experiencing a religious moment, go berserk, lifting Thanasis over their heads and carrying him through the bar like a god for blessing their drunkenness. He in turn sprinkles whiskey like holy water on everyone below, including Ariadne, whose eye catches a drop and weeps for the rest of the night.

As the drink orders pile up at the untended bar, the customers not being wooed by Thanasis' holy performance begin showing their teeth and foaming at the mouth because their drinks are not being replenished as quickly as they can down them. Petros suggests that Ariadne jump behind the bar and mix drinks, since she has already memorized the ingredients of the entire cocktail list. Even if she gets it all wrong, he assures her, the customers are too drunk by now to notice the difference. He will bravely continue working the floor, since his flirtation with an Irish nurse named Pauline was just getting interesting.

Unfortunately, Petros' plans of conquering Ireland that night are usurped by Thanasis. After the parade and the blessing of the heathens ends, all hell breaks loose in The Scat Club, and Pauline and her nurse friends run out without settling their bill. They'd quickly calculated that there would be less penance served up by their hometown priest for not paying their tab than there would be for participating in what they sensed they were about to be swept up in. The girls pressed their pocket rosaries to their breasts and pushed their way, somewhat reluctantly, out the front door.

Throughout the bar candles are now freely staining table cloths with their white, sticky residue, ashtrays are being overturned, and pools of vomit are forming under tables. Thanasis is tossing glasses over the bar, smashing them by the customers' sandalled feet—the sight of spilled blood throwing everyone into a frenzy of stamping, waving, and shouting. Some customers throw off bras, shorts, underpants, while others balance on stools trying to capture the debacle on film to prove to their friends back home that they were actually here. Passersby spotting the orgy from the street rush in to take part in the shedding of inhibitions, so carefully maintained in the cooler climate of their own countries. Is this not, after all, what they had come to Greece to find?

Only Ariadne and Petros are unmoved by the bacchanal. They are assessing the damage wrought upon The Scat Club, which they had so carefully set up earlier that day for the grand soirée, and calculating how long it will take to clean up the disaster after this first treacherous night has passed.

At 3am, after the last reveller is pushed out the front door by Petros, and Thanasis, the instigator, sleepwalks home stinking and unconcerned to his wife, Soula, Ariadne and Petros begin the ritual of cleaning the bar without water. The island is dry and has its water shipped in the bellies of old oil tankers, so there are times of day when the entire water supply is turned off for conservation. Three in the morning is one of those times, leaving the crapulent tourists parched and the employees of the various bars without a drop of water to cut through the filth of the night.

The Scat Club's toilet is drowned in disinfectant, scrubbed with a wiry brush, and flushed, the last trickle of water in the tank raising a few bubbles in the bowl and cutting a shallow path through the thick, green liquid. The glasses are soaked in dirty water, collected earlier in the sink, until morning. Vomit is absorbed with sand, lugged weekly from the beach, and swept up with the dust, dirt and broken glass. And the floors are then painted.

First, hasty layers of whitewash, streaked with urine, are slathered onto the bathroom floor. Petros takes care of this task, not bothering to challenge Ariadne's roster of duties. Next, in the inner room, a thick white line is run along the edges of the floor, trapping everyone within a frame. This is a shared duty between the two co-workers, depending on who finishes the other, smaller tasks first. It is the final job, the whitewashing of the patterned floor in the smaller, outer room that is the most time-consuming and sadistic. Like an insatiable and cruel lover, the front room will bring Ariadne to her knees every night, not allowing her to rush through the act. Her movements must be focused and elegant. There are boundaries that she must respect, and total solitude is required, since any intruder would destroy the intimate rhythm and would force her to start all over again. There are no half-measures in the outer room. It is the room with the most light and thus instantly reveals all its secrets. It is up to Ariadne to hide them well. She chose the outer room herself, recognizing its need and its endless obsession. She becomes as fierce as a wolf protecting her turf, biting the ankles of anyone who dares walk into her territory.

At the same time, who could blame passersby who catch her in the act for their curiosity? It is like nothing they have ever seen before. A young woman down on all fours in and empty and silent bar—long, black hair curtaining her face, T-shirt sliding off her bony shoulders, breasts swinging loose inside her shirt with every movement—painting perfect white circles, lined up like giant backgammon pieces, onto the filthy, grey floor.

Every night after the first, this peculiar act will be repeated by Ariadne, and every night her audience will grow: voyeurs, hopeless romantics, and masochists seeing their own bondage in her task. Some will ask to help her, mostly men who desire her careful strokes for themselves and care nothing for the sanctity of the floor, of the act, the nightly renewal that erases all evidence of what has passed.

She will eventually allow someone to enter her realm, but he will think it is a game, jumping from circle to circle as if it were hopscotch as soon as they finish painting, leaving grimy footprints in their centers that prove his feet are too large and stupid for her bed. Ariadne will send him away immediately and start again. Patiently. Night after night, week after week, until the whole act becomes unconscious, something she has always done, something she could do in her sleep.

4.

It is Easter, the holiest of holy days in Greece, more important than Christmas for a people who value the favourite Son's resurrection more than His actual birth. According to the Julian calendar, the *Anastasi* falls in late May this year and on the eve of Easter Sunday all the island's bars and restaurants are required, by law, to cork their bottles and lock their doors between 11:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m.—long enough for the employees to commemorate the miracle, then get back to work.

Though most Greeks have fully transubstantiated into Christians, the older ways are still apparent in their celebration. Yesterday, on Good Friday, just before dusk, Ariadne watched a procession of old women weaving through the village, carrying icons and a litter that held the remains of the Saviour, then turning off towards *Agia Irini*, the white church built on the highest point of the island. The women clutched unlit yellow candles in their free hands and chanted solemnly in diapason as they marched, indifferent to the camera flashes and the tittering of the tourists who lined the path to

watch the curious display. It had been a grey and unpredictable day, and many of the sun-worshippers had stayed away from the beach.

A few rain drops splashed against Ariadne's cheeks: God's tears, according to her grandmother, who used an alchemy of religion and meteorology as proof-positive that only Greek Easter is authentic because it always rains on Good Friday. The annual cloudburst is almost enough to make Ariadne a believer, though she prefers to think it is Ganymede, the beautiful mortal boy favoured by the gods, who sends the rain.

Ariadne wanted to follow the mysterious procession, see where the old women took the body and what they did with it and the yellow candles, but she had to get to work. No Friday is a good Friday for her.

As she served cocktails later that night, she was preoccupied by another of her grandmother's stories; a story older than Easter of a harvest king, selected from the strongest and most noble young men and granted a year of absolute power in return for his flesh and bones, which would be sown into the soil the following spring as a blessing for the crops. That was the covenant, the *quid pro quo*.

Over the years Ariadne constructed her own version of the story, providing the rationale for the young man accepting the crown, giving voice to the wild hopes he fortified himself with as he ascended the throne of thorns to take his place next to the exquisite queen of a lush and fertile land. (It is true that there were many kings, not just one, but in Ariadne's imagination only one face, one body appears as if recycled, year after year, killed and reborn only to be killed again.) Though the newly crowned king had just taken part in the murder of his predecessor, he had to believe that there was a way to escape his fate, Ariadne reasoned. That by the following spring a decree would be sent down from the heavens in a flash of lightning, changing the rules. Or perhaps he convinced himself that his loyal subjects would come to rely on him so thoroughly that a substitute would be found for the sacrifice, a lamb, or a goat, or a great white bull which would be blessed and then sliced across the throat, its warm blood collected in a golden

chalice. This stay of execution might depend on how the new king chose to exercise his absolute power, whether he used it to instill such fear in his subjects that they were afraid a curse would alight on them if they killed him, or whether he showed such kindness and generosity that their hearts would not allow them to touch a hair on his royal head when his time came. In the end it didn't matter which stance the king chose, Ariadne had to admit, because the people were faithful not to the sovereign but to the ritual, just as she is drawn to the ritual of Easter, with its midnight mass, its candles and its blood red eggs.

Ariadne has often wondered whether she would have accepted the role knowing full well that she would eventually be torn to pieces by her subjects at a party held in her honour, then scattered with the seeds. It reminds her of that expression: better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all. She's not so sure about that either, because after you've lost everything there is nothing left but the torment of remembering.

Ariadne pushes the last drunk out of The Scat Club at 11:25, promising he can come back in an hour. Thanasis conveniently disappeared at 11:00, and she isn't convinced that he'll come back at all. She then makes her way to up the hill to *Agia Irini*. The square in front of the church is already swarming with people, and a candle seller is doing a brisk trade in *lambathes*, meter long, white candles aspiring to be torches. Some of the *lambathes* have pink or blue ribbons tied around them, though most just have a white plastic cup, pierced through the bottom, to catch the dripping wax. "No light now," the candle seller instructs the foreigners who are buying up his wares. "*Mesa-night*," he repeats over and over to the perplexed tourists, who all sigh in understanding and nod vigorously when the candle seller finally points to the 12 on his wristwatch.

Ariadne considers buying herself a candle with a pink bow, which reminds her of her childhood Easters in Montreal with their sparklers, fireworks and the adult privilege of staying up all night. Her family would gather in front of a small Greek church on

Saint Roch Street, which was cordoned off from traffic, well-bundled in fur against the city's fickle spring winds. One year it had even snowed big white flakes that melted as they hit the candle flames, extinguishing the light of the holy resurrection with a sizzle, and making Easter look like Christmas. On Nysas, in the heat, everything seems somewhat unnatural to her. She finally opts for a plain white *lambatha*, its bareness lending it an elegance and dignity that suits her mood.

Karina finds her at the candle table and after she buys her own *lambatha*, she and Ariadne push their way through the crowd and find a spot where they can wait for the second coming. Excited children run through the crowd, playing tag and hide and seek, crawling through people's legs, lighting firecrackers short and thin as match sticks. Some of the bolder boys take the opportunity to run their sticky fingers along the bellies, buttocks and thighs of women, mostly foreigners, who have come to the holiest celebration of the year in shorts and halter tops.

Karina reaches into the cloth bag she is carrying, pulls out two bright red, polished eggs that are decorated with a white leafy design, and hands one to Ariadne for the traditional Easter duel—eggs drawn at midnight.

"Hey, my grandmother makes them like this, with a parsley leaf and a cut-up stocking. Where did you get these?" Ariadne asks, inspecting her egg. She taps its tip with her fingernail to determine whether it is a winner.

"Kyria Marigoula, you know, who bakes all those cookies. Gave them to me when I went to buy a *tsoureki*." Karina holds open the cloth bag to show Ariadne the braided, sweet Easter bread that has another red egg embedded in its dough.

The liturgy and the chanting, which can be heard from inside, get louder and more impassioned as midnight approaches. The crowd in the square is being pushed back by people spilling out of the church. Another vestige of the old ways is the need for the ceremony, the ascension, to take place out of doors so that the spirit can rise into the night sky, so it won't bang its head on the church's ceiling. A few men in suits take

charge of clearing a path for the golden-robed priest and his retinue of angelic altar boys, who are carrying every icon and sacred relic out onto the steps with them. Father Theodoros emerges waving a censer over the crowd, and holding the holy flame high above his head. The faithful standing closest to him jump for the flame like hungry dogs, and the priest hops up and down to keep them from getting it.

Once the holy flame is surrendered by the priest, it spreads quickly through the crowd, and it is only the thick cloud of incense floating over their heads that masks the odour of burning hair, though Ariadne notices and tucks the ends of her braids into her collar. As they wait for the light to reach them, Karina takes the opportunity to slip in the question that has been eating at her since she saw Ariadne outside Thanasis' house in Athens, the question for which she has not yet found a natural segue in all their other conversations, that has been forbidden her right from the start of their acquaintance in the wine cellar. Even now, she hesitates because the question seems prying and inappropriate, and Karina had hoped for a response without ever having to utter it.

"We've become friends in the past month, haven't we, Ariadne?" she begins.

"Of course we have." Ariadne smiles and squeezes Karina's elbow affectionately.

"There's something I've been meaning to ask you. Something I want to know." She pauses and almost changes the subject to hair care products or Thanasis' secret cocktail recipes.

"Ask away." Ariadne touches her candle's wick to the flame of the person in front of her, then proceeds to light Karina's candle.

"I've already mentioned that I'd seen you in the neighbourhood, in Athens..." It turned out they had actually been neighbours all winter, which both delighted and disappointed Ariadne, because she imagined all the grief she might have been spared if she'd had just one real friend.

The altar boys shush the revellers, who in turn shush each other. The priest is now speaking, but no one can hear him. Karina and Ariadne are engulfed by a sea of tiny flames, flickering in the warm breeze.

Karina whispers, "Well, like I've already told you, it was at The Naxian, and you were with..." When she sees how quickly the blood drains from her friend's face, how instantly tears well up in her eyes, she doesn't dare speak his name. Ariadne's egg slips out of her hand and smashes, unceremoniously, at her feet.

"If you want to be my friend, Karina, you'll never bring that up again. Please," she pleads. But the sluice gates have burst open, and as the church bells chime rapturously and the crowd hugs and kisses, cracking each other's eggs while joyously confirming, "Christ has risen," Ariadne's story gushes out.

At the end of it Karina doesn't know what to say, so she apologizes, and it is only then that Ariadne allows the other woman to put an arm around her shoulders, accepting what she thinks is pity. Karina's apology, however, does not spring from pity, but from regret at having dug so deep. Perhaps these are things that she didn't need to know, and she is sorry that she hadn't had the decorum to stop the flow of words.

"Please don't tell anyone, not even Petros." Karina promises, crossing her heart, then her lips. Father Theodoros and his altar boys start singing, and the crowd, including Ariadne and Karina join in, lifting their *lambathes* triumphantly towards the midnight sky to the light the way for the favourite Son while incanting, "Christ has risen from the dead. *Thanatos*."

5.

Memory surfaces and resurfaces, seeping through the pores like sweat, bursting through the skin like blue-black pustules that permanently disfigure us, that break open when we sleep, spotting our pillowcases with florets of red-black blood. Memory denies gaps. It is a story-

spinner, a fabricator, a sycophantic, slavish friend. Obsequious memory, obediently filling in holes when a piece of the story has been lost; sadistic memory, teasing us with truncated, tongueless sounds, but withholding the word, the name, the date so desperately sought; manipulative memory, scrambling the order of events until they appear in sequence as a narrative we come to believe was the course of our lives; unforgiving, relentless memory, resting in the deepest layers of the psyche, building charnel houses from its indestructible bones that shelter the forsaken, the denied, the omitted. All that we hope has been forgotten hides somewhere inside us, intact, and can be triggered at any moment, leaving us at the mercy of encapsulated, timeless passions, small powerful doses of our repudiated selves.

Ariadne remembers his cold breath caressing the back of her neck, her hip bones crushed against his in the back seat of a stranger's car, and a dream of blood washing over her apartment's white marble floor. She remembers a sudden shower and the sound of laughter on a deserted street, his voice in the receiver daring her to resist. Then the walk to his house, so slow that it seemed to defy time, turn it back, as if this act of walking to him was a déjà vu, a choreography she had learned centuries before and could not help but repeat, the clicking of her heels against the sidewalk echoing across the street as if someone else was walking away.

The ability to recall obscure facts and figures is considered a sign of intelligence, as if the act of remembering is within our control and the rattling off of dates of the most significant events in our lives denotes an understanding of their consequences. Ariadne remembers the day and the date he first spoke to her (Friday the 28th), where the minute hand on the bar clock rested the first time they kissed (11), and the number of times the church bells chimed at the moment he cast her out (7). 6 is the longest number of perfect days they spent together, but that was at the very beginning and was never matched. 6 is also the longest number of hours that she waited for him to come back to the marble-floored apartment on the outskirts of Athens, to save her from the despair that his absence induced. 53 is the number of times they made love in the short period they were together, usually in repetitions of 2 or 3. And not one of the digits in his phone number will fade away, though she has crossed the sequence out of her phone

book with a thick, black marker, buried it under layers of white pearl nail polish, and finally torn the page out of her phone book, at the same time eliminating 2 acquaintances and one friend in Montreal who has never replied to her letters, whose surnames also begin with a V. It is as if his phone number has been branded on the inside of her forehead.

Ariadne plays with all these numbers, adding, subtracting and multiplying them in her head, looking for a pattern that will explain to her what has happened, that will make all the variables tally up. She writes long lists of numbers, the solutions to her calculations, in chalk on the floor next to her bed. The answers often come to her in the middle of the night, waking her from a dream with the urgency of a nascent poem. When she looks at her work in the morning, however, none of it makes any sense. In frustration she rubs the list out with her bare feet. Ariadne has never been good at math.

The scientifically-inclined have always been fascinated with the manner in which our memories are stored, the kinks in our retrieval systems, where our mnemonic file cabinets are kept. It is here that we see the inadequacy and the lack of originality of scientific study when dealing with the human psyche. How mundane to envision the brain as a library, or a mini-bureaucracy where everything has its place, to reduce a complex life to a card catalogue and a well-managed office. One would hope that the brain is a craftier, more anarchic tool, grouping patterns and concepts, creating dreams, visions, or great works of art from the melee.

Ariadne has recreated him in her mind's eye, has smoothed out the lines and scars on his face, cleared his gaze of clouds, added colour to the grey cheeks of their last meeting, and removed the frown (though on some days it comes back and she has to retouch the image). This airbrushed, mental snapshot of him never changes. No Dorian Gray is Ariadne's love. She has no concept of how each day alters him. Would she recognize him if he crossed her path today while she was on her way to The Scat Club? Would she sense his presence without having to turn around? Her mind has been playing tricks on her since Easter, making up stories. On her way to work a few nights ago, she thought she spotted the back of his head, and grabbed the arm of a stranger before she realized she had moved.

She would be wiser to rely on smell, stored in the fist-sized snarl of the limbic system, where the most potent and instinctual impulses lie in wait. Smell triggers vivid, full-figured memories; movie stills, paintings, tableaux vivants. It is most adept at seizing us and sucking us into the black hole where all of our memories gather and whirl. Furthermore, smell is involuntary, taken in with every breath, which is distressing for Ariadne since it is her sharpest sense. In the crowded Scat Club she can separate each customer's smell, can tell the alcoholics from the soy milk drinkers—the latter smell sour and taste the same; the Greeks from the Italians—though from a distance indistinguishable, the latter emanate a persistent scent of cologne and hair care products; the dangerous from the safe—the former smell like the blossoms of blue and orange fire spat out of the cast-iron eyes of her grandmother's immense six-burner gas stove in Montreal.

The smell of burning hair at the resurrection pulled Ariadne back into her grandmother's cockpit, where the old woman manipulates the stove's white knobs with the deft precision of a fighter pilot. Ariadne is regularly warned by her grandmother to stay away from the stove, told over and over that she will get burned. Ariadne is fascinated by fire, drawn to its heat, to its dancing colours. She has recently been to a circus where she saw someone swallow fire, another person juggle it, and tigers jump through it as their tamer cracked her whip. "You'll get burned," her all-seeing grandmother admonishes from the other room as Ariadne approaches the stove. But Ariadne does not believe anything she hasn't tried herself. She believes she is magic, like the fire eater and the juggler. She is devastated when her long, fine hair shrivels into spidery black ash then crumbles onto her sweater. Though otherwise unhurt, she is humiliated by the remaining locks that her grandmother hacks off, by the spanking that adds insult to injury, and by the realization that she isn't the exception but one of the minions who prove the rule. For the rest of her life, she will defy this fate.

Closely related to smell is taste, intimate and discerning, hiding in the dampness of Ariadne's mouth. The tongue reaches out willingly and records a repertoire of sweet, salty, sour, bitter, its most complex function discriminating all those separate qualities in a single bite,

a perfunctory lick, classifying the new taste as poison or benign. Ariadne has noticed that, like food, people have distinct flavours in their mouths; luscious and rich as Belgian truffles, repellent as Danish blue cheese. In a single kiss she can determine whether a prospective lover will make it past her threshold, whether there is a point to ever kissing him again. She has also noticed that sometimes a taste recurs, a reincarnation of an old love in the mouth of someone new. A tartness or a mustiness erupts from the past, transmogrifying the new lover into someone long gone. Since coming to Nysas, Ariadne has accepted half a dozen new lovers from as many countries who have, for the most part, tasted pleasant enough. One was fresh and minty as chewing gum, but quickly lost his flavour. Another was as sickeningly sweet as the candy apples she could never finish as a child, her taste buds drunk and obliterated by too much sugar. She would place the half-eaten apple on her window ledge and leave it there until her fear of the brown, decomposing fruit forced her to throw it away. It is true that even now she doesn't have much of a sweet tooth. It is salt she has always craved with its ability to drain her mouth of all its juices, to make her tongue come forward, pleading for water.

Though she cannot bear to open her eyes when swimming in the sea, as a child she often forgot to close her mouth. Once she drank so much salt-water she almost drowned. The lifeguard who carried her out onto the beach pushed on her chest with both his hands, pressed his mouth to hers. She coughed and vomited as she regained consciousness, but not because of the salt-water coming back up, corroding her throat, but because of the taste in the lifeguard's mouth, liver and onions, tastes she still cannot stand.

The lover she is trying to erase from her consciousness tastes of salt. As others destroy photographs, love notes and letters, tear them into confetti, burn them then flush them down the toilet, or block their ears against favourite songs that remind them of their loss, Ariadne has given up salt, has learned how to swim with her mouth clamped shut. When one of her recent conquests leaned in to kiss her, and the slightest tingle of salt in his saliva touched her lips, she pushed him out the door before she drowned, not in him, but in memory.

Some people worry about not being able to remember, about losing their lives to brain cells that pop like the bubbles on sheets of plastic. They take photographs, make lists, keep journals in order to leave behind a trail for the day when all they will have left is the past. Ariadne has no need of these methods. Ariadne is plagued with remembering, incapable of forgetting, no matter how much she scalds her taste buds or plugs her nose, no matter how many lovers she takes on the island, she cannot make herself forget a single thing.

6.

It is 3:30 in the morning and Ariadne lingers at The Scat after Petros has gone home because, just as she was putting the final touches on the circles in the front room, Thanasis burst through the stable doors looking for his keys, not only tromping all over the fresh paint, but leaving white footprints that tracked the club-footed route of his search on the grey floor of the inner room. Petros did his best to quickly erase the footprints with paper towels before they dried, but Ariadne's task cannot be rushed. She tells Petros that she'll lock up, and after he has gone, she gets on her knees and begins again, erasing the night and Thanasis' intrusion as if neither of them have ever taken place.

This is the first time Ariadne has been alone since her arrival on Nysas. She has done her best to avoid the total solitude that would allow her to reflect upon her current predicament by making sure that every free moment outside The Scat has been cohabited by at least one other person. This is not hard to accomplish on an island like Nysas, overrun as it is with people seeking company. There is Karina and/or Petros, who she sees at breakfast, lunch, dinner and after work, not to mention their daily excursions to Anthemusa or to the island's quieter beaches when energy allows. There are the other Perms she's become acquainted with, people who own shops and bars, or work in them, who are always happy to have someone drop in for a chat during the slow hours of the

day when most tourists are baking on the beach. Then there are the men who she occasionally brings home from The Scat Club in order to avoid the most disturbing thoughts, the type that spring upon her late at night, before sleep can obliterate them, and in the early morning, before full wakefulness can push them back down. It is during these in-between states that Ariadne feels most vulnerable.

Finding herself unexpectedly alone in The Scat, Ariadne tries to concentrate on her final task as if it were meditation, tries to block out the thoughts that fight to come free, to materialize before her like holograms. In the silence behind the stable doors, she is unable to subdue all of them at once, and the thoughts that escape rush out in a furious, unstoppable stream.

The island has shape-shifted since her first visit last year. Where she once saw charm, she now sees decay. Where she was once dazzled by the preternatural beauty of the visitors, she now averts her eyes from their leering, twisted faces. Could it have been she who leaned over the side of the ferry as it approached Nysas and waved excitedly at the strangers down on the dock as if she were returning home after a long voyage? Had the small, white houses of the quaint Cycladic village once reminded her of children's building blocks playfully stacked onto the side of the mountain? They now seem to lean obliquely, threatening to topple and crush her as she drags her carcass up and down the narrow path that leads straight from The Scat to her apartment.

Was she the same person who had danced all night in the Elysian Fields, and got so drunk on what she now knows is nothing but colourful moonshine, that she was incapable of walking back to her rented room at the top of the hill without the help of a Frenchman named Yves, equally drunk, who she'd danced with briefly at the beginning of the night? Did they really sing "*Le Coq est Mort*," the only song they both knew besides "*Alouette*" and "*Napoleon avec ses cent soldats*," at the top of their lungs as they stumbled up the donkey track past what was now her apartment? Yves was impressed that Ariadne had learned the children's songs in her second grade French class in Montreal.

She'd insisted on "*Le Coq est Mort*" (*Il ne dira plus kokodi, kokoda...*) because it was almost dawn and someone had to wake the sleepy natives. She wonders who the exhausted Perm who lay in her metal-framed bed at Kyr Georgis' might have been, and what type of curse she'd visited upon Ariadne and her incidental companion for waking her up as they repeated the nonsense song until they arrived at what Ariadne thought must be the door to her room, and Yves pulled out his willy in what he assumed was the bathroom. She and Yves laughed at the whole incident the next morning, comparing it to a French farce, as they snuck out of the house carrying Ariadne's two small suitcases before the landlady saw them. Ariadne has seen her former landlady several times, walking past Kyr Georgis' house and stopping for a moment to greet the goatherd or to exchange fruit for milk. She's shown no sign of recognizing Ariadne, which means that either all *xeni*--foreigners--look alike to her or last fall wasn't the first time the poor old woman had been pissed on in her own bed. Ariadne burns with shame every time she crosses the old woman's path.

And was it really possible that she had been taken in by Alik's plastic smile and her mercenary friendliness at the No Problem, just as she watches The Scat's customers being taken in by Thanasis' guile? She remembers climbing the No Problem's stairs for the first time, strangely pleased there was a cocktail that bore her name. She had felt welcomed by Alik, who waved her over as she stood, uncertain, at the pub's threshold, and then treated her to a cloying mix of creme de cacao and coconut liqueur called "Ariadne's Dream," a drink Ariadne now dissuades all customers from ordering. It took two beers to cleanse the sugary dregs from her palate, and by that point she had not only confessed her breezy reasons for leaving Montreal to Alik ("I was suffocating from boredom--you know what I mean? I wanted to meet some new people, breathe new air..."), she had asked her smiling hostess for a job. Alik no longer smiles that plastic smile at her. There are other types of smiles she directs at Ariadne, but these are exercises in other types of manipulation.

Down on her knees in The Scat Club, it is hard for her to believe that she was once one those carefree, ignorant monsters whose only concern is their own enjoyment, and who increase her misery one by one as they get off the ferry at the port. It is not only the island that has shifted its shape. She now knows how easy it is to be one thing one minute, and its exact opposite the next if you're not paying attention. She's had several dreams where she waits for new arrivals down at the port and carries them up the donkey track to the village on her back. This, she assumes, must be part of the dead cock's curse. As the weeks pass, she has begun to not only dislike the tourists, but to fear them. They are metamorphosing into otherworldly beasts who hide in the labyrinth of grey stone paths and white leaning houses, waiting to catch her off guard and devour her.

Ariadne is accustomed to men hanging around the front door of The Scat at closing time, hoping that if they follow her home, she will invite them into her bed. One admirer followed her while strumming a guitar, serenading her with a song of his own creation called "Aria for Ariadne." He sang and howled underneath her balcony until Kyr Georgis came out waving his dagger in the moonlight, and Ariadne let the guy in just to shut him up. She does not take this attention as a compliment, just the natural consequence of her position at The Scat. It is easy to fall in love with the only woman who will talk to you.

But there is no moon shining tonight, and as she begins to walk up the lightless path towards her apartment, she senses she is not alone. Her nostrils pick up the smell of sour sweat and stale smoke from a rolled cigarette before she sees the embers fall to the ground. She feels a pinch of dread in her chest and quickens her pace as she hears heavy footsteps closing in behind her. Her feet know the way, where each crack, each hump, each depression in the stone occurs. They have even developed a type of radar that allows her to avoid the donkey droppings that regularly line the path. A sleepwalking Ariadne could make her way up and down the stone steps barefoot

without ever losing her balance or stubbing a toe. Without stopping to ask questions, she begins to fly up the path, and the heavy steps fall behind. She is near the turn-off to her apartment when she hears her pursuer stumble, then the sickening crunch of bone to stone. She does not wonder whether he cracked his kneecaps or his skull, but quietly cheers as a garbled cry of pain echoes between the buildings.

A few minutes later, on the steps of the cheese room, she tells her story to Karina and Petros, while trying to catch her breath. They both shrug and tell her to take the long, lighted way home next time she's alone. Ariadne doesn't tell them that she doesn't dare be alone again because of all the damned thinking or that she's afraid that the buildings will fall on her or that the composition of time and space has changed for her, changes with every passing minute she is on Nysas—each minute has grown to roughly three, and each step requires the energy of four, while at the same time no time seems to be passing at all—or that the shortcut home will soon be too long for her and she will be forced to sleep between the tables of The Scat Club, just so she can be there before Thanasis arrives to open up. Instead she makes Petros promise to always wait for her after work from now on, and he quickly agrees.

Karina volunteers to go down to the path, to see if "*to zoón*"—the animal—is still lying there so she can give him a piece of her mind. "Who do these tourists think they are, coming to our country and terrorizing us?" She repeats her story about the Swede she'd flirted with who told her to her face that he loved Greece, but didn't like Greeks. Whenever Karina is angry at tourists, they all turn into that odious Swede. At least she got to kick him in his *Upsala* (she laughs at her own euphemism), and is eager for an encore. But Ariadne begs Karina to let it go. For some reason she is afraid of putting a face to her stalker. She is also suddenly uncertain whether she imagined the whole thing, whether her mind, left to its own devices, conjured the beast. It will be easier to forget the whole incident if it remains in the shadows, something that almost happened on a moonless night, a night-terror that will be cured by the light of day.

Ariadne asks her friend if she can sleep with her in the cheese room. She snuggles up to Karina, who snores sonorously all night long and wraps her arms and legs around Ariadne, dreaming that she has managed to lure Adonis, one of Nysas' pretty boys, into her hollow.

7.

Petros leaves The Scat Club the next Saturday night, once the trash has been hauled out, the bottles refilled and the floors painted, with the intention of never returning. After the first grueling months he concedes defeat, unable to bear Thanasis' constant harassment. His departure is not the result of some Herculean indignity. It is the slow accumulation of small aggravations that has finally sent him hurtling over the edge.

First, Thanasis complained that Petros spilled too much alcohol when refilling the bottles, and that this made them look shoddy and suspect because their labels were disintegrating and peeling away. Then he took issue with the cleanliness of the bathroom. Petros was not laying on the whitewash thick enough and as a result streaks of urine were still visible between the brush strokes. "You must treat the bathroom floor as if it were your own," he dictated. "I want to be able to eat off it." Petros did not counter that most people washed their bathroom floor, and if Thanasis wanted to eat off it, that was his own problem. Finally, there were the constant taunts about the way Petros spoke to customers ("You're as charming as a bedsore, man"); jibes about how often he pushed drinks on them ("They're here to drink, man, not to diddle their assholes—look, they're diddling their assholes" [*And they were*]); and even about how many glasses he could carry at once ("Don't drop them, man, don't drop them. Look everybody, Nureyev dropped them"). Petros thought if he ignored Thanasis he would just go away, but the big boss was known as much for his egotism as he was for his

boozing. And if you ignored him, he threw things at you—bottle openers, ice cubes, wedges of lemon, or tampons that he stashed behind the bar for the express purpose of slipping them into the Campari-sodas of unsuspecting customers and watching them tumefy. Once, when Ariadne was bleeding profusely, Thanasis refused to give her one. She stuffed wads of the rough paper they stocked the bathroom with down her wet and sticky underwear instead.

Petros is a patient man, the kind of guy who can just shrug off almost anything. But somehow Thanasis managed to put a knot in his stomach that grew nightly, until he was unable to eat from the discomfort. The last thing Thanasis said to Petros on that Saturday night as he tossed two crumpled thousand drachma bills on the bar was, "I pay both of you lazy slob too much."

Whether this was meant as a joke or not, Petros did not ask. He just stared at Thanasis, grabbed the somewhat soggy bill, picked up the last of the large green garbage bags, walked through the squat door and never came back—despite the hysterical crying and pleading from Ariadne the next morning. When he finally got out of bed, he packed his few belongings and moved into the cheese room with Karina, occupying the second, metal-framed, lumpy bed.

Ariadne tries to stay mad at Petros, but she can't. How can she blame him for leaving Thanasis, for doing what she wishes she had the gumption to do? She silently absorbs Thanasis' constant abuse. For the most part, it hardly seems to leave a trace. She is already too numb to notice any pain other than the one that carried her to Nysas.

For the next few nights Ariadne works the floor of The Scat Club alone, waiting for someone new to be hired by Thanasis, someone desperate enough to stand the conditions—preferably someone who has just arrived on Nysas and hasn't heard the rumours yet. A few come and then vanish as quickly and tracelessly as they appeared. They are mostly useless anyway. One of them claims an allergy to whitewash, another's

skin is too sensitive to rinse the glasses in the morning. Ariadne's favourite loser makes her carry all the trash on her own, claiming he has a bad back, holding onto his spine and groaning like an old woman at the mere suggestion he help. None of them lasts more than two nights, and when they don't show up again, she is secretly relieved. The Scat is no place for a mama's boy.

A Brit named Tom is eventually hired—one of those tourists who has partied too much and prematurely squandered all his money. It is immediately apparent to Ariadne that Tom has spent more time drinking in bars than working in them, but at least he helps her take out the garbage at the end of the night and does not develop any mysterious and convenient allergies.

Tom likes to banter with the customers, to sit with them at their tables, and drape an arm around their shoulders when posing with them for their souvenir snapshots. He is part of their vacation experience and this is one way they can bring him home with them to show off along with their deep sea sponges and their fisherman's caps. Ariadne estimates that she has gone home with thousands of tourists to dozens of countries, more than she will probably get to visit in her lifetime. Occasionally she receives photos of herself in the mail; pictures that she didn't know existed where she has been caught off guard, without the paid-for smile that Thanasis demands, her misery and exhaustion contorting her face.

Ariadne and Tom get along as much as they have to in order to get the job done. Mostly she just ignores him because she knows that his days are numbered and there is no point in getting too close. As soon as the island cops discover that a foreigner is working at The Scat, taking a precious job away from some poor Greek slob, Tom will be brusquely escorted out of the bar and down to the port, then unceremoniously thrown off Nysas.

The unceremonious part isn't exactly true. There will be a display of sorts, a toady parade, a funeral march. Tom will be made an example of for all the other

tourists seeking a few extra drachmas to prolong their stay. If the police could get away with shaving his criminal head and parading him through the town in shackles while frenzied, bloodthirsty villagers threw yogurt, eggs and donkey dung at him, they would. It is only their fear that police headquarters in Athens might catch wind of such swaggering that keeps them in line. The island's officers are already on parole for indecent acts in their respective villages--no one is sure what--and patrolling Nysas serves as their punishment. This makes them hate all tourists.

But Tom lasts a few weeks longer than Ariadne had imagined. The cops, excited by a series of drunken brawls that have broken out over the last few weeks, never pay any attention to him. They are too busy randomly bashing in the skulls of suspected brawlers, or those stupid enough to stand around and watch, who invariably lose a few teeth or go home with a new nose or an eye patch and a story to tell. One man who tries to stop a fight is beaten senseless by the cops. A helicopter is called in from a neighbouring island, and the Samaritan is airlifted to the nearest hospital. The next day at the Way Out, the Perms whisper that the cops themselves start these altercations as a substitute for sex.

Tom stays on until he has enough money to drink and loaf around on the beach for the last weeks before his flight home. Until the night he quits, Ariadne feels she has merely tolerated his presence, but now she is angry at being abandoned, yet again. She is totally indifferent as to whether Tom, the person, stays or goes. It is Tom, the burden-lifter, the partner in grime that she is angry at. Tomorrow night she will be stuck doing all the work by herself again: smiling ceaselessly, posing for pictures with people she hates, serving drinks and then mixing them when Thanasis gets too drunk to keep track of the ingredients and, instead, tosses glasses filled to the brim over the bar, watching them smash into a thousand pieces that stick to the floor in flavours of banana, vanilla, and cherry. During Thanasis' show of abandon, Ariadne wonders whether there are secret photos of his real face, the one he shows her when he is displeased, floating

around Spain, France and Germany. She wonders what the tourists, Thanasis' spur of the moment friends, think when they see the photographs in the harsh light of their real lives, once the hangovers and the sunstroke are mere memories. She curses Thanasis and his band of happy drunks as she scrapes away the sticky bits of glass off the floor with a spatula. There will be some other Tom soon, she is certain, but when? Even two nights alone with Thanasis is more than she can possibly bear.

She refuses to talk to Tom on his last night. When he tries to cheer her up with his crude jokes, she just walks away. When he offers to take out the trash and clean the stinking toilet before he goes, she just shrugs, lifts her eyebrows in a display of indifference and starts painting the floor. Tom says goodnight and walks towards the door. Ariadne begrudgingly mutters something unintelligible in reply and doesn't turn around to see him go. At the last moment, before vanishing into that oblivion where all former employees go, Tom turns around and casually confesses. "You know, I cut their heads off."

Ariadne looks up and a big, gelatinous tear lands on the surface of the whitewash and rests there until she swishes it away with the brush. She stares at him and involuntarily shudders, picturing kittens, pigeons, girlfriends. "You do what?"

"When they're all huddled together, drunk and pleased with themselves," he explains, "I offer to take their picture, then I cut off their heads."

At first Ariadne is taken aback by the spitefulness of Tom's action, but slowly, despite herself, a smile creeps over her face, and the next thing she knows she is laughing uncontrollably, tears running freely down her cheeks. Tom laughs along with her, and when he catches his breath he sputters, "What are the fuckers going to do? Come back and get me?"

Ariadne thinks about the decapitated tourists for a long time after Tom leaves, and decides it is no longer necessary to tell the truth when she is at work. None of the headless customers care about the truth anyway, or would even remember it when they

regained their heads upon leaving Nysas. It is a relief to suddenly realize that the person they all take home in their photographs doesn't have to be her.

8.

A time-honoured tradition on Nysas is to sleep with only those people whose countries you want to visit. Why screw a Brit, the logic goes, if you don't like fish and chips? Ariadne has become geographically selective about her companions, though her travel plans are as flexible as her libido. Once her six months on Nysas are up, she will be visiting France and Spain, since she already has places to stay there. For Italy, she is told, she must wait until August when boatloads of Casanovas wearing the latest designer flip flops descend upon the island, leaving no female unfucked. Holland is also on her agenda, though she has never thought of going there before. Apart from the Danes, the Dutch are the most civilized visitors to Nysas, and if they can keep their wits about them here, their country must be a marvel of enlightenment. A trip to Amsterdam, Ariadne imagines, will be the perfect antidote.

As if in response to a wish (or one god's recompense to Ariadne, while the others are asleep, for a previous, less auspicious bequest), two Dutch men arrive on Nysas. They have come from a neighbouring island and intend to visit another, then another until it is time to go back to flat and orderly Holland.

Ariadne comes across them as she walks through the square on her way to work, and one of the men looks up at her and smiles, missing an ideal opportunity to win the game of backgammon that he and his friend are playing inside a beam of late afternoon sun. Ariadne smiles back at him, and takes a moment to look him and his friend over. Both men are blonde and tanned, though the smiler's friend is more muscular, his forehead over-large, and his countenance somewhat cheerless. The smiler is lanky, and his long legs are splayed out casually underneath the table. He gestures towards an

empty seat and Ariadne accepts. She squeezes through the tightly-packed chairs of the *Kafenion*, planting herself between the two men and ignoring Petros, who is sitting a few tables over, talking soccer and drinking coffee with a couple of old men.

"You're so lucky," she says before either of the men have a chance to open their mouths. "You get to sit here like civilized human beings, chat, eat, have a drink. I start work in twenty minutes and that's it for me. I won't get to sit down until tomorrow morning."

"Where do you work?" the smiler asks with interest, his lips stretching awkwardly to pronounce the English words, which emerge crisp and rigid. Ariadne has become a decoder of accents and she beams at both men, not sure which of the two she wants.

"At The Scat Club, across from the bank. It's the one with the blue awning—you can't miss it."

The release of this information has been carefully planned by Ariadne; it is part of her *modus operandi*. The men now know exactly where to find her if either of them is interested, and this saves her the effort of having to chase them. She is far too tired to chase anyone. The smiler, in turn, provides the proper response.

"Maybe we'll pass by later tonight, check you out." He begins snapping his fingers and humming the melody to a jazz tune that Ariadne doesn't know, while his friend, less and less interested in the whole exchange, stares into space and spins a backgammon piece like a coin. "I love jazz," he continues, a little over-enthusiastically. "It's very cool, man. What do you say, Jan?"

"Yeah sure," the friend replies. "We'll come by later." He flips the backgammon piece into the air, catches it with his other hand.

Ariadne looks at her watch, and tells them that it is time for her to get to work. She winks at both men as she says good-bye. "See ya later, I hope."

"For sure," the smiler replies, blushing slightly. "What was your name again?"

The three exchange names and shake hands. The smiler's name is Rutger—Rut for short, he adds. Ariadne thinks his name is perfect, with its reference to both dirty sex and stagnation—the two ruling factors in her life on Nysas, but she doesn't mention this to Rut since she is trying to be charming. Rut watches her saunter up the narrow path away from the square and towards The Scat until she is out of sight. He repeats her name out loud three or four times, letting its syllables tickle his tongue.

Ariadne, in contrast, forgets Rut's and Jan's names immediately, needing to hear a name at least two or three times before it registered. Nysas, after all, is an island of bodies and faces, not names. It is down at Anthemusa where everyone is naked that impressions are made and partners are chosen. The texture of lips, the smoothness of skin or the stroke of a hand might be retained if the physical sensation was truly unique. There is too much turnover to bother remembering anything as insignificant as a someone's name. It would have to be scratched into the wall by her bed to be recalled, like the markings of a prisoner counting days. Ariadne is not up to keeping track. There is only one name that matters to her, and all the rest amount to "other," or "not him." She likes her lovers anonymous, inhuman, because if they become human she might have to start feeling again.

Later that night, after The Scat's floor has been painted, and the padlock snapped into place on the stable doors, Ariadne, Karina, and Petros, over-tired but buzzed, congregate on the front steps of the cheese room, just as they do after every shift, to exchange the night's gossip, complaints, observations and revelations, while the village donkeys bray their own complaints to the heavens and the last tourists shuffle home singing, squealing, falling. Other Perms sometimes drop by Kyr Georgis', knowing they will find company and maybe even the dregs of a pinched bottle of brandy or ouzo. But the drop-ins are just incidental. Ariadne, Karina and Petros have become a solid family unit.

Within days of his departure from The Scat Club, Petros secured one of the best jobs in the village—at least that's how he sees it. He is now the only male waiter at "Giuseppe's Harmonica", an Italian café owned by a soft-hearted Neapolitan who treats his employees like family. Every night upon his return from work Petros is full of wonderment and vim, having played manservant to some of Nysas' most attractive women. "The Italian girls look the best, smell the best, taste the best, smile the best, and they dress much better than any other country. I swear you can see right up those short skirts. I love it." (That said, the Italian girls will have nothing to do with Petros.)

Karina paces nervously on the landing in front of the cheese room, and is in no mood to talk about Italian women in short skirts. "Those damn whores," she spits, punctuating every third word with a hand thrown histrionically in front of her. "You know what they said to me tonight?"

Ariadne and Petros wait for the answer. Ever since she began working at the "Tartarus Grill"—a taverna down at the port which is owned by two sisters of little education, class or beauty, who bought it with their life savings from their years as the island's only prostitutes—Karina has asked and answered her own incredulous questions every night.

"It's ten o'clock and the customers are squeezed in like mice. My arms are full of dirty dishes, and I'm running back and forth to the kitchen, trying to keep the hungry beasts fed so they don't start gnawing on their neighbour's livers, and the older one, the bigger bitch comes up to me and whispers in my ear and do you know what she says?"

Not a word from the audience. The silence before Karina's storm.

"She says, 'Doesn't it bother you that you're so fat?' And I just stand there. holding four plates full of fish, macaroni, steak and potatoes, and all I want to do is pour them over her stupid head, but instead I put them down on the table, then go into the kitchen and bawl my eyes out while the sister-bitch watches." She wipes away a

tear and takes a deep breath. "If I could face looking for another job, I would've walked out of there right then, in the middle of the dinner rush. *Putanes*."

Ariadne and Petros always listen to her patiently and when Karina stops pacing, shedding tears and finally sits down, they comfort her with their own horror stories. But tonight, Ariadne's tale is not the perpetual, bitter lament. Tonight at least part of her story is good, because Rut visited her.

9.

It had been a dismally busy night at the bar. It seemed to Ariadne that the longer the season wore on, the more uncivilized the masses became. It was rumoured that a Swede had been escorted off the island by the police for fucking a donkey on the beach in broad daylight. Ariadne tried to picture what position might accommodate such an act between man and beast, and when she couldn't work it out in her head, she decided that it could not have happened. Then again, she reminded herself, anything was possible on Nysas because there were no rules worth abiding by. Rules were for civilized places and this place was an ongoing fiasco. She delivered the fiftieth Orgasm of the still young night, and returned to her position between The Scat's two rooms, where she could keep an eye on everything.

There are two rules Ariadne has managed to implement at The Scat Club, rules designed to make her life easier and to keep the animals under control. The first rule is that no one is allowed to stand. There is so little room to move between the squat tables and stools that if customers were allowed to stand, splay-legged and armed, Ariadne would have to pounce from table to table to get from one end of the room to the other. And though some customers might agree that a peek up the pretty waitress' skirt is worth a spilled drink or two, the tables are wobbly, and Ariadne has no interest in table-dancing. She enforces the No Standing rule with an iron fist.

Not all customers happily comply with the rule. A few shoot out of their seats every few minutes and then remain standing, defying Ariadne's curt requests that they sit down. Those frightened of authority back down immediately, shrinking into their seats, for in the universe of The Scat Club the bringer of libations is only second in command to the pourer of said libations, and no one wants to offend her lest they be cut off. Others, who are not yet over the fact that they were born of woman, argue vehemently for their right to remain erect until they are sure that the whole bar has witnessed their rebellion and that no face will be lost when they obediently plunk back down. In cases of extreme egotism, the disgruntled customer leaves the bar cursing and never returns. The last scenario is rare, since most drunks are easily herded, sheared and slaughtered.

Ariadne has become used to pushing people back into their seats and it hardly bothers her at all, except when it shows up in her dreams. One night the sound of her own voice woke her up and she found herself standing by her closet and demanding that the door sit its ass down immediately. She crawled back into bed and pulled the covers over her head, but could not get back to sleep.

Tonight, a Frenchman named Boucher and his wife had come to The Scat for the first time. It was whispered amongst the Perms that Boucher was the richest man on Nysas, the one who owned the white mansion that was surrounded by marble sculptures copied from the Parthenon and re-interpreted by a famous Greek artist. On her way to Anthemusa, Ariadne often dreamed herself into the cool halls of the mansion in the valley, wondering when she'd run into the handsome prince.

Handsome princes are a rarity, her grandmother regularly reminded Ariadne after reading her fairy tales that invariably ended happily. She wanted her granddaughter prepared for the real world. Beauty and wealth, she warned, seldom mixed, and youth and wealth almost never. For the truth, the old woman advised, it was better to read the myths. Ariadne thought of her grandmother as she stared at Monsieur

Boucher and his wife and scratched her nose. "If your nose is itchy, you're going to get spanked." This more obscure piece of her grandmother's wisdom echoed in her head, and she quickly moved her hand away from her face, hid it behind her back.

Monsieur Boucher was short and skinny, with the tanned, leathery skin of a peat bog corpse. He wore a loose, cotton shirt, white cotton pants and sandals with socks. Madame Boucher had a head of wild, dried out hair in a shade that no one had ever been born with—a shocking orange with deep brown roots that made her complexion look yellow. Madame was slightly overweight, and gravity was working its downward prerogative on her over-rouged cheeks.

Ariadne approached the Bouchers and cordially welcomed them to The Scat Club. She informed them in French that only hard liquor and cocktails were served, no beer, wine or ouzo. She then pointed to two empty seats at a table near the bar.

Madame Boucher looked over at the table with disdain. "It's with others," she said to her husband.

"We will wait until there is a free table," Monsieur Boucher informed Ariadne.

"That may be a while," Ariadne replied politely, "and everyone sits with everyone else here. There are no reservations."

"Then we'll stand," the Madame snapped back and headed for the bar. "Bring us two brandies, seven stars," she commanded.

Ariadne followed her and tapped her on the shoulder. "Excuse me, *Madame*, but there's no standing. There's not enough room." She moved her arms in a back and forth gesture like a runway traffic controller, describing the clear path from the front door to the bar. "I have to be able to get through with the drinks. Please, *assoiez vous*."

Ariadne pulled the two stools out for the couple. Three Germans at the table, equally disturbed by the imminent invasion of their personal space, squeezed in closer together, forming a unified front. Madame Boucher threw Ariadne a dirty look, then looked back at her husband, showing him with one deadly glance the extent of her

displeasure, before slamming her big, flowered butt onto the unoccupied stool. Her husband followed suit, both of them turning their backs to the Germans, who looked relieved to be left alone.

Ariadne returned a moment later with the two brandies, and asked to be paid. Rule number two at The Scat is cash on delivery. There are too many drinks, far too many comers and goers, and too little time to keep track of who had five Orgasms, and who'd settled for a sloppy French Kiss. Only the inner circle, the regulars who practically live at the bar, are given tabs. They drink on an honour system. At the end of each night Ariadne asks them how many drinks they've had and as long as they come within one or two drinks of their actual consumption, it is called even. On some other night they are bound to make up for it as they count on the blurry, multiplied fingers they hold in front of their faces. Everyone else has to pay as they go. No one has had a problem with this system except for Monsieur and Madame. When Ariadne asked for 500 drachmas for their drinks, Madame Boucher dismissed her with a toss of her hand. Ariadne repeated herself and this time Monsieur Boucher informed her in a manner that was not altogether polite that he would pay her at the end of their stay in her "*bar d'enfoirer.*"

Ariadne is not that big a stickler that if someone politely requested a tab, she would not consider keeping track for them. But the Bouchers were starting to grate on her nerves. She had a hundred other people to slake and didn't really have time to argue.

"It's the rule," she told him firmly, "to pay when you get your drinks. *S'il vous plait*, 500 drachmas."

Madame Boucher frowned at her and spat out, "*Salope.*" Monsieur Boucher demanded to speak to the manager.

"When are we going to get to the guy? I want to hear about the guy. Someone pisses you off at work every night. Where's the guy?" Karina grumbles.

"I'm getting there. Will you just wait. It gets good."

Ariadne, who was beginning to tremble, pointed at Thanasis, already rat-assed and wagging his tail behind the bar, spilling more booze on the bar's surface than in the dozen shot glasses he had haphazardly lined up. Monsieur Boucher got out of his seat and pushed Ariadne out of his way, while Madame Boucher continued to curse her in gutter French, which she'd obviously picked up somewhere less elegant than the white mansion in the valley.

And then something happened to Ariadne that had never happened to her before at The Scat. She lost it. Completely. She reached out and grabbed the Frenchman's shirtsleeve before he could get Thanasis' attention.

"I don't care who you are," she screamed over the strains of Cab Calloway halfway through "Minnie the Moocher." "You pay your bill now, asshole!"

"Let go of me, you dirty little slut," Boucher growled back. Ariadne could see the glint of a gold tooth at the back of his mouth.

"Then don't pay, you rich bastard. The drinks are on me. Just take your milk cow by the tits and get out of my bar."

Thanasis' attention had finally been caught, but it was too late for him to do anything. The fight had already gained its own momentum and would continue to escalate until it self-destructed.

"You want money, take the fucking money, *putaine*." Monsieur Boucher grabbed her wrist and twisted it, then slapped a wad of bills which amounted to more than what Ariadne made in a month into her palm. "There's your fucking money, now go shit in a corner."

Ariadne looked at the bills and, before her hands could be soiled by Boucher's stench, shoved the wad down his white cotton shirt and screamed, "Get the fuck out of here and never come back!"

As he stood there fighting with her, calling her names, and as she fought back, unleashing her fury, Monsieur Boucher (*Fred* to his friends) momentarily allowed himself to step outside the situation and look beyond its surface where he was being humiliated by an overgrown gutter snipe. What he saw was the young woman's passion clashing against his own, and it struck him that he had not experienced such an intensely erotic moment in a very long time. His opponent radiated a burning, surreal beauty in her rage, and if he did not leave the scene immediately, he knew he would be forced to dash himself against the rocks by his big white mansion to overcome the unbearable sorrow at never being able to have her. In that moment, standing face to face with that radiant hellcat with her hands on her hips, nostrils flaring, and crazy black hair writhing around her head, he saw the old dried-up wreck of a man he had become and was humbled. Speechless, he pulled the wad of bills out of his shirt and put it back into his pocket.

As the shamed Monsieur Boucher and his filthy-tongued wife quietly left The Scat Club, Rut walked in past them and saw the exquisite afterglow of fury penumbrating Ariadne's head like a halo. Later, he would tell his friends that it had been love at first sight, and he would describe their chance meeting in the square. But it was actually when he saw Ariadne in The Scat Club, drenched head to toe by her glorious rage, that Rut fell.

"What's his name? Rat?" Karina asks, making a face.

"No, Rut. For Rutger."

"What kind of name is Rut?" Petros inquires, repeating the name mechanically, turning it into a sound effect. Ariadne slaps her hand over Petros' mouth.

"Shut up. He's Dutch and very cute. He's a musician."

"What a surprise. A musician," says Karina, rolling her eyes.

Rut watched the rise and fall of Ariadne's chest for a few moments and decided that she was too busy to pay any attention to him, though he would have gladly sat in a corner unnoticed, watching her float through the two rooms. Instead, he walked right up to her and asked her when the bar quieted down.

"Never," she replied, not immediately recognizing him.

"I was hoping to talk to you for a bit," he said.

"Come back around two. Sometimes I get a chance to sit down around then."

He promised to come back and then left. Ariadne, whose mind was still racing from the encounter with the Bouchers, was not affected by Rut's presence one way or another. By the time 2 a.m. rolled around and he came back, she had forgotten that he had been in earlier that night. She didn't let on that she didn't recall his promised return, but she admitted immediately that she'd lost his name.

Rut didn't care what she called him as long as she kept sitting across him, twisting a straw into an intestine with her long, tapered fingers, their cracked fingernails polished gold. She gave him fragments of information about herself in a quick, colourless monologue. She was twenty-one and had come to Greece from Canada the previous year, she'd lived in Athens for a while, and then she ended up here. There had to be more than that, Rut thought. The way her eyes darted back and forth in their sockets told him that she was leaving out vital information. One did not simply leave Canada and end up on Nysas. Chance was always mixed in with fate and will. She'd willed herself here, Rut decided, but he was in no hurry to find out why. He was just happy that she had, whatever her reasons, so that he could sit with her a while.

The more questions Rut asked, the briefer Ariadne's answers became. When he inquired why her parents had left Greece in the first place, "Because," was her impatient reply, accompanied by the release of a short breath through her teeth. Rut

was afraid to ask another question, and they both sat in silence, avoiding each other's eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said, finally breaking the impasse. "It's just that all night the customers try to figure me out, as if it mattered to them one way or another. Where am I from, how did I get this marvellous job." The word marvellous was stretched out sarcastically. "I've often considered printing a flyer with all my vital statistics on it so I could just hand them one and shut them up for the rest of the night. The ones who can read, anyway. You want to know a big secret?"

Rut wanted to know a big secret very badly.

"I don't even like jazz. As a matter of fact, I hate it."

This was not the type of secret Rut was hoping for, though were he not trapped in his romantic illusions about Ariadne, he would have understood that the secret she'd imparted revealed just how deeply she was tortured—something she did not even share with her closest friends on the island, nor with the few friends back home she still kept in touch with, since the extent of her misery embarrassed her. Because he was a musician, she expected him to understand the scourge of being forced to listen to music that offended her soul ten hours a day. But he didn't. He just continued to dig, looking for a deeper secret that was more in tune with what he wanted to hear. He wanted her to say that she fell for him the first moment she saw him, or that her heart expanded in her chest when he approached, or that from now on, because of his existence, her life would be just a little bit better. But these were his secrets.

"What else can you tell me?" he asked as casually as he could.

She looked at him straight in the eye, grinning like the Mona Lisa with her slightly mocking gaze. "I lie to them all," she replied.

"Who?"

"All the bloody tourists who want to know all about me, but really don't. They ask me questions just to give themselves an excuse to tell me their life stories. As if I

care." Ariadne tossed the twisted straw onto the table, and started picking dripped wax off the tablecloth with her fingernail.

"What do you tell them?" Rut asked carefully, resisting the urge to tell her everything there was to know about himself, from his orphaned past, to his first sexual encounter with a display-window prostitute in his home town in hopes that she would feel the urge to reciprocate.

"It depends on who they are." She grinned, pleased with her own mischievousness. "I told a table of Brits that I'd never left this island. That I was a born and bred Nysian and that I'd learned English from an exiled American who was my first lover."

"And they believed you?" Rut wasn't sure what to believe himself and he felt a pang of jealousy towards the imaginary American.

"Sure they did." No one cares what you say in here, as long as you keep talking and smiling. You know what one of them said to me? Too bad that he wasn't a Brit so you wouldn't have picked up that terrible American accent."

"Shit."

Rut couldn't think of anything else to say, mostly because he was too captivated by the sound of Ariadne's voice to respond in words. Soon there were no words coming out of her mouth at all, just a strand of sounds and inflections, like music. What Rut really wanted to do was to stand up on the shaky table and respond in kind—sing to her, serenade her with an old sailor's love song in his native tongue. He suppressed the urge by nodding, smiling and keeping his lips pressed together, not wanting her to think he was showing off, not wanting to risk scaring her.

"Did you tell him that you pretend Kyr Georgis is your father and doesn't allow you to go on dates?" Karina asks. "How she could claim to be related to that old pervert, even as a joke, is beyond me."

"Yeah, I told him. Then he asked me if I'd told him the truth."

"How will you ever find out?" Ariadne answered. She then excused herself and began the process of closing up The Scat for the night by making the customers hate her. "Bottoms up," she yelled through the doorway to the inner room, "life is short and your drinks are about to die."

As she said good-bye to Rut and started walking away from his table, Rut called her back. "I'll come by tomorrow night at this time," he promised. "And I'll figure out exactly who you are."

"Whatever," she replied, only mildly flattered. "I've got to close up now. Throw everyone out. You'd better go. It gets ugly."

"Do you want me to wait for you outside?" he asked carefully. "Walk you home or something?"

Ariadne's tone changed subtly as her defenses went up. "No, I don't think so. It's been a long night, and I've got to clean up. Maybe some other time. Goodnight."

She walked into the inner room without looking back at Rut. Every one of them wanted to walk her home, as if she didn't know what that meant. They all asked, but she never accepted. She appreciated those who waited to be invited. This was one of her personal rules.

Once behind the bar, she picked up an empty ice-bucket and a spoon, then began banging the bottom like a drum. "Time's almost up, all you drunks. You have five minutes left."

The clanging of the ice-bucket was earsplitting to the lingerers already half-way to a hangover at that late hour. "Don't just sit there staring at me. Down it or lose it."

"You used to be our friend," one drunk lamented before sucking back the last drop of his cocktail, swirling the last pebble of ice in his mouth.

"I turned into a pumpkin at midnight," Ariadne shot back. "Pumpkins have no friends. Three minutes and counting."

"So is he from Amsterdam, at least?" asks Karina, always looking at the practical side of things.

"No, some other town."

"Well that won't do. What if you end up in some village where everyone wears wooden shoes?" Karina stands up and clomps around inelegantly.

"Me and Old Man Socrates saw you sitting with him in the square, and he seems like an all-right guy," adds Petros.

"God save us from the all-right guys." Karina makes the sign of the cross.

"You've slept with everyone else. Give the nice guy a break for a change." Petros sidles up to Ariadne, puts his arm around her shoulders, then drops his hand towards her breast. Ariadne swats it away like a fly.

"Fuck off. I'll see. If he comes back tomorrow night, I'll see."

"Invite him to the beach first so you can check out his working parts."

"Don't you worry, Karina. I've been here long enough."

"And ask him if he brought along his wooden shoes." Karina's clod-stomping dance becomes more animated, and Petros and Ariadne jump up to join her. They dance until the sun rises over the water, the crickets go to sleep, and the donkeys finally quiet down, relieved that another day exists in their miserable lives.

Rut goes back the next night, and the night after that. By the fourth night his devotion has impressed Ariadne so much that she asks him to meet her at the Way Out the next day at noon. Rut decides not to tell her that he'd planned to leave the following day for the next island on the map. He graciously (and gratefully) accepts the invitation, then postpones his departure indefinitely.

10.

Rut's extended stay is cut short due to an egregious error on his part. On the third morning he wakes up in Ariadne's single bed, after the third night he's made careful and quiet love to her because she is too exhausted for the wild and carefree kind, Rut looks into her dark and sleepy eyes and says, "I love you." He then wraps his body around hers and tries to squeeze a response out of her silence.

Under normal circumstances, Ariadne's heart might have opened up, releasing cool waterfalls, babbling brooks and flocks of little blue songbirds at the mere mention of love from such a handsome, worthy and eligible man. The two of them would slide down the waterfalls together, dip their toes in the babbling brook and sing along with the songbirds in a secret language that only those in love can understand. Lying together in her single bed, she would squeeze him back, entangling her limbs with his until all sense of separateness disappeared, until which arm or leg belonged to whom became irrelevant. Lost in the endless embrace, she would stare into his blue eyes, press her lips to his and then breathlessly whisper, "I love you, too."

But these are not normal circumstances. Nor are they circumstances that Rut could have foreseen, since the Ariadne he crawled into bed with the night before is a changeling, a doppelgänger who has nothing in common with the person he believed he had come to know in the last few nights. This mute, humourless creature is pale and stunned, blighted by an incessant ringing in her ears that has kept her up all night; a high-pitched homing signal that resonates throughout her entire body, possessing her like a wrathful spirit.

Ariadne lies motionless under Rut's body until she can no longer stand the pressure, the urgency of his grip, or the heaviness of his bulk on top of her, for only in an

embrace that is returned does the weight of the other dissolve. She is seized by a fury that makes her push Rut off with both hands.

"OK, OK, relax," says Rut, sitting naked on the edge of the thin mattress as Ariadne pulls on the clothes that are tossed closest to the bed with the haste of someone woken by a fire alarm in the middle of the night. He reaches out towards her to give her something to hang on to, but she ignores his hand and bolts for the door.

"Where are you going?" Rut calls out as she dashes across the long balcony, and prepares to swan dive down the stairs. "What's wrong? All I said was I love..."

Ariadne stops dead in her tracks and turns around. Flecks of spittle gather at the sides of her mouth, and her pupils expand until her eyes turn completely black. "You don't love me," she snarls. "Tomorrow, or the next day you'll get on the five o'clock ferry to Athens, then fly off to Holland where your nice little Dutch girlfriend is waiting for you. In a week or two, you'll forget all about me, so spare me your love. You're all the same. You might as well leave right now."

Ariadne dives down the stairs, surfacing on the path in front of the house. Stretching her arms out in front of her, she breast-strokes through the hot, wavy air and then disappears between the frothy white houses of the village.

The commotion has not gone unnoticed by Kyr Georgis, who finds Rut standing on the balcony naked and in shock, the stark contrast of the white skin beneath his tan line making his pink penis look embarrassed. Kyr Georgis clicks his tongue, shakes his head, and laughs. "*Krips'to, filé*—put it back inside, my friend—before some crow steals it for her breakfast." The goatherd's voice snaps Rut out of his stupor. He looks down at his blushing penis, then at Kyr Georgis, and goes back into Ariadne's apartment, slamming the door behind him, though he can still hear the old goat laughing at him outside.

Rut pulls on his shorts and his shoes and decides that perhaps it would be best for him to leave immediately, before things get any worse. Jan is waiting for him on the

next island and he would have had to meet up with him eventually anyway. A day or two made no difference now. Ariadne didn't give a shit about him. She told him he was like all the rest. He looks at the chalk lines on her wall and rubs out the last one. It is true that he has a couple of girlfriends at home in Haarlem, but this feels different, like a famine deep inside. He knows that he could easily abandon both women, without any grief, for Ariadne, even for the idea of her if she loved him back, just for a day or two.

His eyelids feel heavy and he realizes that he is about to cry. He does not want to be found sitting on her bed crying. He tries to hold back, clearing his throat in an effort to control the oncoming flood, and begins picking through the piles of clothes by her bed, looking for his black T-shirt. If he hurries home and packs, he can make it to the ferry's ticket kiosk down at the port before it shuts down for siesta. That way he will be sure to take off before his flesh weakens. He pulls the damp sheets off the bed and shakes them, expecting his T-shirt to fall out. Where is it? He looks under the bed, but all he finds is an inch of dust and one stray, blue sock.

He'll look for her in the square before he leaves, just to say good-bye. No, he won't. He'll go down to the port and stay there all day, until it is time for the ferry to take him away. She'd told him that she never went down to the port because the sight of the ships always made her want to escape, but there was no place for her to go.

He kicks the piles of clothes, turns them over with his foot one last time, then accepts that his T-shirt is no longer in the room. It got up and left him at the same time she did. In her hurry to leave, Ariadne had pulled it over her head, not realizing that it wasn't hers.

Rut, bare-chested and sad, decides that he deserves a souvenir. He picks out a tank top that he's only seen her wear once. It is one of the cheap T-shirts sold in Thanasis' and Aliki's shop—fuchsia with The Scat Club's logo, which features a balloon-cheeked Thanasis blowing into a saxophone while a group of drunken tourists, their ethnic features exaggerated, drink a bubbling blue liquid out of the bell through straws.

After Rut pulls it on, he notices that the shirt is stretched out around the chest, holding the imprint of Ariadne's breasts. A tear escapes, and then another. Rut wipes the tears away with the shirt and tells himself that it is time to salvage his vacation, to change it back to what it was before he laid eyes on her. This, of course, is not really possible. What is done cannot be undone.

Rut goes to his room, packs his duffel bag and heads resolutely towards the port. He refuses to even look back at the town, fearing that if he sees Ariadne again, he will not be able to tear himself away. But at the last minute he allows himself one final weakness. On his way down the donkey tracks he runs into a Dutch fellow he met a few days earlier when he was trying to buy some hash. Rut waves at the fellow and tells him that he is off to meet Jan on the next island, but could he please do him a small favour? Could he deliver a note? Rut quickly scrawls his address then a shaky goodbye on the back of a piece of gold cigarette paper.

The Dutch fellow assures him that the delivery is no problem, anything for a compatriot. He shakes Rut's hand firmly, "Safe travels, my friend." He puts the note in his pocket and winks at Rut. "Ariadne," he smiles, "*Mooi*—nice."

Rut feels a slight cramp in his chest, but lets it pass. The fellow is already married to a Greek woman who lives on Nysas, and Rut might have felt envious of his compatriot's good fortune had the wife not seemed a little brackish, as if the sea-salt carried on the breeze has permanently pinched her face. And even if he weren't married, what could Rut do? Ariadne didn't love him, and he had to accept it and move on, though he doesn't like how his compatriot said her name.

Rut resumes the slow march down the donkey tracks to the port to wait for his ship—a condemned man wearing the flag of his executioner.

11.

Where has Ariadne escaped to through the sinews of the village? Why did she run off so quickly when all poor Rut did was reveal himself to her, make her a gift of his heart? Why was her reaction more appropriate to a threat of violence, murder, or imprisonment?

Her first stop is the "Snake Skin," a boutique owned by an island veteran named Ket, who Ariadne sometimes visits in the afternoons. Ket is wielding a long stick with a hook on the end of it and hanging her best-selling merchandise outside the shop. T-shirts with nonsensical and somewhat bawdy slogans are the most popular with the tourists, this season's favourite a smiling ass with "Sit on my happy face," tattooed across the left cheek.

"A little early for you to be up, Ariadne," Ket says as the younger woman approaches. "Your pretty Dutch boy kick you out of bed for misbehaving?"

"Worse," Ariadne mumbles.

"What could be worse?"

"He told me he loved me."

Ket laughs, a patronizing laugh that aggravates Ariadne in her already tender state.

"It's not funny. Stop laughing, you old hag." Ariadne's face screws up with discomfort as she holds back tears of frustration.

"And you believed him?"

Ariadne does not respond. She doesn't want to give anything away to this woman who has been here too long and who apparently believes nothing.

Ket takes a few deep raspy breaths, and is finally calm enough to speak again, though a giggle hisses through her teeth every now and then.

"They all love you until they get back on the boat, my little girl, until they go to the next island, until their feet touch the next shore. And then it starts all over again with someone else. That's what these islands are set up for. Fleeting love, fugitive lust. None of it ever lasts."

"Well that's what I told him, and he looked as if he was going to cry, and I can't stand to watch a guy cry. So I left."

Keti makes a face, half-frown, half-smile, her eyebrows furrowed, but her eyes still showing amusement.

"Now you've gone and given away our number one secret. Of course he'd cry. You've spoiled his illusion. Ruined his perfect, romantic holiday. You're not supposed to tell them the truth, you know."

"I know," Ariadne replies, "but there were reasons."

"Reasons, reasons. There is no reason here, only chaos and fancy. For reason you stay at home."

Ariadne backs away from the shop and looks around the corner to make sure the coast is clear.

"Don't be like that. Go find the little blonde and kiss and make up. It's your duty as a Greek woman to make the man feel better, you know." Keti laughs even harder.

Ariadne walks off in search of a more sympathetic ear. She would go to the cheese room to crawl into bed with big, safe Karina, but she'd had company last night—a huge Danish sailor who made her colossal friend look petite when he slipped his arm around her waist. And she doesn't want to risk running in to Rut, who might still be waiting for her in her room.

Who else could she tell? Besides Karina and Petros, Ariadne has made no real friends on the island. She has dozens of acquaintances amongst the Perms, but no one she can open up to or trust with her secrets. Shortly after her arrival, she decided that

the less the Perms knew about her affairs the better because Nysas, among other things, was thick with gossip. She doesn't know what the word about her is because she has never given any of the Perms the opportunity to delve into her psyche or between her legs. Whatever rumours circulate about her are purely conjecture, and though the rumour mill loves conjecture, it also needs at least one piece of evidence to keep turning.

Ariadne greets a few Perms half-heartedly as she heads towards The Scat Club. She climbs through a window and hops down onto a table, almost tipping it over, then sits down on a stool as if she were a customer waiting for someone to offer her an Orgasm for a change. She sits there, folded into herself in the dark silence, and replays the phone call she received the night before.

It was almost nine o'clock, just before the rush. Had it been any later, she's sure she would not have been called to the phone. Aliko stuck her head through one of the windows, searching the bar with her empty eyes for Ariadne.

"Telephone," she yelled, then disappeared.

"Make it quick," ordered Thanasis. "No time for boo-hoo-I-miss-you now."

Ariadne ran out of the bar and up the stairs to the kitchen of the No Problem. One of the cooks held out the receiver and mouthed "It's a man," before handing it to Ariadne. Disappearing into clouds of pungent steam coming from cauldrons of *chile con carne* and chicken curry, Ariadne slowly brought the receiver to her ear and whispered, "Hello?"

"What took you so long. This is costing me money, you know," the grim voice replied. Ariadne froze.

It had been just over two months since she'd last spoken to him. Two months in which she'd tried, but failed, to forget him by surrendering herself into the arms of others; she could think of no other way to endure an eternity in which he didn't exist. And now, she was going to be rescued. If he were calling her here, he must miss her, he

must still love her. "I forgive everything," she wanted to sing joyfully into the receiver. "I forgive the betrayal, the cruelty. I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you. I'll quit my job and come home tomorrow. All you have to do is say the word. Tell me, promise me that you love me and I'll believe. I want, I need to believe."

Instead she managed a timid, "How are you, Yannis?" doing her best to control her quavering voice.

"Listen. I didn't call to talk about me."

"I'm so glad to hear your..."

"I just wanted to know what the fuck you think you're doing down there?"

"What do you mean?" The anxiousness in her voice was quickly moving beyond her control, and Ariadne felt as if a snake were coiling itself around her wind pipe, suffocating her. She covered her mouth to stifle a gasp.

"You keep sending me these fucking letters..."

"What are you talking about," she said blanching, her voice now no more than a squeak.

"...about how much you love me and at the same time you're screwing all of Europe."

"I never..."

"Listen, you slut. Don't deny it. I have friends on that island."

"But you left me..." Tears rolled down her face liberally and disappeared into the bubbling cauldron of curry.

"I know what's going on there. Fucking liar."

"...didn't want me anymore."

"What would I want with a dirty rag like you?"

"You wanted..." She couldn't bring herself to say the name: "...her."

"Damn, fucking whore. Don't bother me again."

"But I love you," Ariadne wept, her voice barely audible as he slammed the receiver in her ear. "I love you, Yannis" she said again to the dial tone, as she stood in the way of the frenzied kitchen staff, unable to put the phone down.

The cook finally took the receiver from Ariadne and placed it back in its cradle. "You'd better go, Ariadne, before Aliki comes to get you." The cook wiped away Ariadne's tears with her stained apron.

Too late. Aliki stuck her head into the kitchen and shouted so everyone could hear, "What the hell do you think this is, Miss Ariadne, a party held in your honour? Get your ass back downstairs."

Ariadne obeyed, silently marching back down into the abyss of The Scat Club, that dark chamber of tangled delights which proved to her, once and for all, that hell existed on earth.

Penelope, her Greek-Swedish co-worker-of-the-moment, looked at Ariadne's pained face which, despite its tan, seemed to have lost all its colour. "You all right?" she asked Ariadne. Ariadne nodded vaguely. "Stay away from Thanasis," Penelope advised, "he's pissed off that you got a call during working hours."

"When else would I get a call," she said numbly, walking past Penelope, then past the glaring Thanasis and into The Scat's washroom. She scrunched down by the toilet, the soles of her sandals resting in the puddles of piss that had already formed on the whitewashed floor, and she doubled over holding onto her stomach. She began to shiver and patches of cold sweat erupted all over her body. The room spun wildly, and Ariadne held onto the toilet to stop herself from being pulled into the maelstrom. Bile rose in her throat, burning everything in its path with its bitter-sweetness, and she bent over the stinking bowl and gave up everything she had ever taken in, everything she had ever been. When she was completely emptied, she got up slowly, using the sink as a

crutch, and rinsed the sourness out of her mouth with the island's tainted tap water. She then went back into the bar to face the wrath of Thanasis and the crowd.

Nothing touched her that night because there was nothing left to touch. Not even Alikí could hurt her, hard as she tried, when she came down after the night was finally over to reprimand Ariadne about the phone call.

"Do your worst bitch," Ariadne thought as she stared unflinchingly into Alikí's empty eyes. "The joke's on you. Someone already killed me tonight."

The only thing Ariadne heard the smiling Alikí say was that she was not her secretary and would not be running up and down the stairs to summon her every time some "lovelorn asshole" decided that he wanted to masturbate to the sound of her voice. Ariadne almost burst out laughing when she heard this, because numb as she was, she'd noticed a glint of jealousy in Alikí's eyes, she'd heard a tiny crackle of envy in her throat.

"Don't worry, Alikí," Ariadne replied, trying hard to keep a straight face. "No one else is going to call." Alikí mistook the strain in Ariadne's face for holding back tears of remorse and smirked.

As Ariadne painted the floor that night, losing herself in the hypnotic motion of the circular brush strokes, the laughter she had held in earlier in Alikí's presence welled up and burst out. It was a crazy and incessant laughter, the laughter of someone who had lost all hope, who had landed ankle deep in the muck of despair and no longer cared to try to climb out. It was the last, futile scream of someone who had lost her soul.

Rut found Ariadne on her knees, stained white with paint, laughing, streams of tears flowing off her chin. He foolishly mistook her laughter for bliss and joined in, picking her up off the floor and throwing his long arms around her. "What's so funny, baby? Tell me so I can laugh with you."

Unable to speak, Ariadne just kept on laughing, holding onto Rut so tightly he could hardly breathe. To him, the laughter and the embrace proved her need for him, her

love and her happiness in his arms. His heart and lungs felt overwhelmed by his intense love for her and he almost confessed right there and then, amidst the raucous laughter. But she was squeezing even tighter and he had to loosen her grip around his neck so that he didn't pass out. He was half right about her needing him. If he weren't there to hang on to, she would have slipped even deeper into the muck, up to her cunt, then her breasts, then over her head until she completely disappeared. She'd have no will to resist.

He took her back to her room, still laughing, and made love to her until the dawn light licked the sea. After she fell asleep, he went out onto the balcony to have a cigarette. He offered one to Kyr Georgis, who had been at his post all night, trying to get a glimpse into Ariadne's dark room, but having to make do with the sounds of love coming through the curtains—some hers, mostly Rut's.

When they woke up a few hours later, Rut told her he loved her, and everything changed. Ariadne scurried into the shadows of the hellpit she's accepted as her home to weep over her fate. Rut left Nysas heartbroken—for he truly was in love—without really understanding what happened or what he'd done wrong. He too wept over his fate, and then did what he had to do.

On the next island he will break someone else's heart for consolation in the endless, vicious circle that mimics the search for love.

Section II

12.

Death, in this story, has a name: Yannis. A truly unspectacular name for one so pivotal in Ariadne's wretched fate on Nysas. Every second man in Greece is named Yannis, but this particular Yannis has escaped the mediocrity of his name because he is evil, charming and Ariadne's first love.

If we delve into the recent past, explore the avenues and dark alleyways that Ariadne unknowingly followed upon her arrival in Athens, we might understand how she came to the unavoidable circumstance of fucking death. How she found herself on that singular and predetermined road that every young woman who has not yet reached twenty-one must eventually tread; a road which drives her through life and to the grave.

The peripheral details are as follows:

Ariadne flew from Montreal to Athens via London. She was fearless, excited and ready to live her own life after leaving the maternal enclave in Canada for the vast olive-scented bosom of Greece. On the plane, as her index finger traced the red and blue lines from the new world to the old on the airline's fold-out map, a flock of snow-white birds, light and transparent as clouds, escorted Ariadne through their sky, guiding her to their roost.

After a brief holiday on the island of Nysas, she returned to Athens to carve out a niche. The brand new apartment on the outskirts of city seemed to be awaiting her arrival; on her second day she found the fifth floor temple with its pristine, white marble floors still covered in a thin layer of marble dust upon which no foot had ever left its print. The view from the kitchen window was of Piraeus, with its basin of blue sea water rocking rusty trawlers and passenger ferries to sleep, while the white and beige

houses on the surrounding hills opened and closed their shutters like heavy eyelids with the waxing and waning of the sun as if they too were being hypnotized. There was a marble balcony that ran the length of the apartment where Ariadne could sit late at night looking for falling stars, wishes on the tip of her tongue. Though the apartment was compact, its two rooms were bright and airy, and the whiteness of the walls and the floor gave the impression of open space. At the same time its smallness was an advantage, since only a few choice purchases were required for Ariadne to set up her first home.

Unlike other fledglings who still think in the singular, Ariadne didn't skimp on her furnishings. She wanted sets of things: dishes, cutlery, bath towels, armchairs. She even bought a double mattress which sprawled on the floor in the center of the main room, unabashedly awaiting a partner to fill up its other half. Who that mysterious other might be was not of immediate concern to Ariadne because she was confident that it was only a matter of time before he appeared. She didn't know that confidence is the first human quality that irritated the bird-like gods, covering their divine limbs with unsightly red welts, or that time travelled at an altogether different pace when you were alone and waiting.

After the initial flurry of activity subsided and all the material possessions she needed to start her new life were acquired, Ariadne sat at home admiring the four walls that represented her independence and freedom, waiting for someone to knock on her door and invite her out, or to fill the other half of the huge mattress. But no one knocked on her door. The phone didn't ring because there was no phone. A finite number of phone lines were available in the new neighbourhood of pastel lowrises, and they had already been snapped up by the better-off and more devious, through bribery. Everyone else in the building used the orange plastic phone in the convenience store around the corner and bribed its owner to keep their secrets. For truly private conversations, there was always the kiosk on Venizelou Avenue, the main drag, a few blocks away, where

the old sentinel was hard of hearing. But even if there had been a phone, it would have made no difference. No one knew Ariadne was waiting in her apartment with the view of Piraeus from the kitchen window. No one in Athens even knew she existed.

Ariadne became despondent very quickly. A loneliness she never knew existed held her hostage in the fifth floor temple. She felt exiled from the world, from all who loved her or who she might love. She lay on her mattress and wept bitterly for all she had left behind, for the people and things she had taken for granted, which she now understood had constituted a very fine life. While she waited for something, for anything to happen, Ariadne was gripped by a boredom so intense that it engendered an even deeper, debilitating boredom. Her despair became so fierce it colonized her sleep. She was convinced she was shrinking, shriveling away, and that one morning soon she would look into the bathroom mirror and nothing would look back at her. She took a taxi to Monastiraki, the city's ancient market area, and while the meter ran, she purchased a full length mirror so she could keep track of herself as she paced the white marble floor of the pretty little apartment where she'd buried herself alive.

In those rare instances when she convinced herself to leave the apartment and venture out into the void of the anonymous night, her actions became exaggerated, her voice louder as she attempted to attract some attention. She resorted to parading herself past the over-cologned men who leered at tourist women down by Syntagma Square, who groped her with long-nailed hands when they cornered her on dark side-streets, because their insults, their crassness proved she was still alive. These shady encounters, of course, had nothing to do with the love she sought. They were not even better than nothing because they erased her further, partitioned her into body parts that were carried away and disposed of on the side of highways among the weeds of abandoned fields.

The worst part was the embarrassment. Maybe those poor souls who had never known any other state, those orphans of fate who were left on doorsteps, abandoned in

dark forests or thrown off cliffs into a raging sea, and somehow survived to tell a story that no one wanted to hear were numb to the embarrassment. But Ariadne was ashamed of her loneliness, of suddenly finding herself an outcast, and tried to hide her predicament in the letters that she wrote to her friends back home. She reported in painstaking detail how wonderful Athens was, describing all the places she'd visited and all the friends she had made, creating a fantasy city made up of the broken bits and pieces of what she'd left behind glued together with what she'd hoped to find—a marvelous/ desolate place where she was the sole inhabitant. She made jokes about the landlord who lived across the hall from her and who had asked her if she was a communist before renting her the apartment because she was wearing a red coat, and the hateful woman who lived downstairs from her, turning them both into characters from a novel.

"Why are you banging on the floor with a hammer," the downstairs neighbour demanded one morning when she'd run into Ariadne, who was on her way to the vegetable market (though conceptually disappearing, her body still demanded to be fed). This was not a question, despite its wording. The woman made a fist and hammered the air as she spoke, as if cheering for a dictator. Ariadne was given no time to respond.

"And you're hammering in the afternoon, when we're trying to sleep. My husband is a fisherman and gets up at 4 a.m. He needs his siesta and so do I. You will stop hammering on the floor or I will report you, *Amerikanaki*." The fishwife spat out this final insult and looked Ariadne over with disdain before marching off, her fist unable or unwilling to cease its hammering motion.

"But I don't own a hammer," Ariadne called after her weakly, waving her own fist slightly then jamming it into her pocket. Baffled, she watched as the woman disappeared into their apartment building.

When the first of these letters reached Montreal, Ariadne's friends would gather in the café on Saint Denis where she'd often spent rainy afternoons sitting at a table by

the window, staring at people walking by and sometimes blowing them kisses. They ordered a round of Gin and Sevens, her favourite drink, and read her fairy tales of Athens out loud to each other, laughing as they imitated her grandiose gestures and her breathless, rapid delivery. They left an empty seat at their table in her honour, wishing out loud that she was still there with them, and admitting that they both envied and admired her courage. But assuming that she was busy and happy, they were slow in responding to Ariadne's letters, and some didn't reply at all.

Ariadne looked desperately through the smoky glass of the building's mailboxes, assuming that the non-existent letters were being delivered to her neighbours by mistake, until the fishwife told the man who owned the convenience store that Ariadne was stealing their mail. When the landlord confronted Ariadne with the rumour, she went out and bought a small, yellow-handled hammer and began tapping on her marble floor during siesta.

The subsequent letters she mailed off in the dead space unoccupied by her friend's responses began to show her desperation. The Ariadne her friends had known no longer seemed to exist in the accounts they received. Even her handwriting was different, as if suddenly she had taken to writing with her less adept hand. The ones who initially responded, stopped writing. They, after all, still had the same, predictable lives and phones that rang. Saturday night plans that Ariadne was once an integral part of went on without her, the gap of her absence closing over with a scab that was picked off and forgotten in nights of activity, new faces and places in a familiar landscape. Her mother still wrote to her, but Ariadne continued to lie to her mother, fearing that the overprotective woman would fly to Greece and drag her back into the womb.

Those who had a home and have lost it through their own weakness, or worse, have given it up are punished by the gods for their stupidity, for their arrogance. The

gods prefer to play tricks on the solitary, fully imposing their will on those who are shunned, those no one will miss. They know the secret passageways into the solitary soul, into a mortal's greatest fears, vulnerabilities and conceits. They know, for instance, Ariadne's greatest conceit is that she is necessary, irreplaceable, and that this fall from grace and into loneliness has almost killed her (since a conceit is often the flip side of an unspeakable fear). They also know that Ariadne has secretly considered taking her own life rather than just going back to Canada full of the lies she writes in the letters she sends her friends. This is exactly where they want her. But up above the clouds that hover over Ariadne's apartment building, a debate rages:

"She's not strong enough. She's going to die prematurely."

"Our people become such wimps in the New World. They used to be stronger; even Arachne lived a thousand years after she was turned into a spider."

"And that pissed Athena off, so she stepped on her."

"Let her die."

"After we've brought her this far? Our plans are not complete, the story hasn't even started."

"But we know how it'll turn out anyway, so where's the fun?"

"We don't entirely know. There are number of choices and the details are always different."

"This fork in the road, that bottomless pit, it all ends up the same."

"Have we no pity left?"

"Frankly, no."

"And what happens to fate if we let her die now? This is not her *moira*. She dies, but not like this."

"It's not my fault she's so weak."

"She's so young; you were young once."

"Are you calling me old?"

"Technically speaking you're ..."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"And what about you, weren't you once mortal? One would think you would have more compassion."

"Wrong again."

"I'm tired of this game. Can't we come up with something more original than marrying life to death?"

"But that's what we do."

"Why?"

"Because we can."

"Because we must."

"Because there is nothing else left for us to do."

"No festivals to attend."

"No temples to inhabit."

"All we have left is caprice."

"Let's raise a storm!"

"Let's dance on the roofs!"

"Let's destroy Athens!"

"We'd never hear the end of it from Athena."

"Fuck Athena."

"Ssh. She'll hear you and turn you into an ass."

"Let's blow it all to bits, blow it all to bits."

"Wake up, Ariadne, wake up."

First they sent down a baby breeze, cooling against the cheek. It grew into a gust, raising dust, blinding eyes, so there would be no witnesses to their game. The gust

turned into a small, graceful twister, shaking windows like an earthquake, lifting shrubs and trees into the sky as if the gods were picking flowers.

Ariadne's kitchen window was open, but her eyes were shut. She was so close to disappearing, curled up on her double mattress, the layer of black dust that covered her marble floor made no impression on her, the shaking windows did not rouse her or disturb her in the oblivion of her loneliness. The leaves and branches that were pushed through her window, covering her like a shroud, burying her alive in her pretty little apartment, were not felt by her skin, she had receded so far from its surface.

It was not until later, when she was awakened by the squawking of a snow-white bird perched on her head and plucking out single strands of her hair, that she saw the feral state of her apartment, that inside had turned out. She shook the leaves and branches off her body and picked her way into the kitchen, flapping her hands above her head to disentangle the bird's claws from her hair. She shooed the uninvited guest out the kitchen window. Only after the bird had flown out did she notice the piece of blood-red paper, not even slightly creased, resting upon the snaky branches and dead flowers.

Ariadne studies the piece of paper with its bold black script, confused. What she holds in her shaking hands is an invitation to dance with the gods, but she doesn't know this yet, and she doesn't believe in fate. To her the note's appearance in her kitchen is just dumb and wonderful luck that has provided her with a reason to leave her tomb. To haunt the Athens night like the ghost of who she once was.

13.

The moon glows full over Lycabittos hill, opening and closing its blind eye as clouds drift past Athens' central, jagged peak, and Ariadne zips by on her way to her date with destiny. She's spent all afternoon preparing for her coming out and has

decided to wear her favourite dress, a backless, purple tunic, with an ankle-length trail. She wants to make an impression on as many people as possible at the mysterious gathering which she's been summoned to by the blood-red invitation.

As Ariadne stood on Venizelou Avenue and waited for a passing trolley or cab, whichever came first, fear crept up her spine and curled its icy fingers around her nape. Over the last few months she had adapted to her loneliness, had made friends with it so it wouldn't torture her, and this excursion into the night, along with the all-but-dead hopes it aroused, made her feel like a traitor. Ariadne was suddenly filled with anxiety and she considered going back home, tearing up the invitation, burning all the pieces and flushing the ashes down the toilet, like she had so often done with the photos of lovers she no longer loved. (In her darker moments, this is what she thinks she is being punished for.) This path of retreat, of course, is a cul de sac. When the gods ask you out, you go or risk being turned for your impertinence into a mule, a pig, a weasel—whatever an individual god finds funny, or a group of gods can agree upon after a series of long-winded and petty arguments.

Before she'd even lifted her hand to hail it, a cab stopped at the corner where Ariadne waited. She handed the driver the invitation and he took off at break-neck speed, weaving in and out of traffic, taking side-streets and unpaved alleyways, and racing around traffic islands until Ariadne's head was spinning and she had lost track of where she had come from without establishing the direction in which she was heading. The cab finally stopped before a nondescript storefront on a closed-down square in a part of Athens Ariadne had never been to before. The cab sped away as she checked the address on the door against the one on the blood-red invitation, even though she'd asked the driver to wait. Deserted, she cautiously approached the glass door. A white-gloved hand pulled back a velvet curtain, the same shade of red as the invitation, and someone wearing what looked like an undertaker's hat with a gauzy black veil draped

over the brim peeked out at Ariadne, then let the curtain fall back into place. Ariadne took a deep breath and moved closer to the door with the measured and solemn steps of a reluctant bride walking down a flower-strewn aisle. The front door had no handle, so she tapped lightly against the glass with her fingernails. She took another deep breath as the door was pulled open from the inside, and the red curtain was drawn back by the same white-gloved hand.

Ariadne has every reason to be afraid of the mysterious invitation, of the night, and of what awaits her beyond the red curtain, but not for the reasons she assumes. Her social skills will kick in effortlessly the moment she steps down into the coloured lights and the familiar music that rises from the basement club onto the landing where the red curtain hangs. The things she has to fear have not yet been articulated in her consciousness. They are like fragments of dreams that you can't remember in the morning, but which leave you with an uneasy feeling for the rest of the day. And though her instinct is strong and her palpitating heart might have sent her back home under different circumstances, her rejection of loneliness overrules.

Ariadne slowly exhaled, then stepped over the threshold to meet her fate, and the blood-red curtain fell behind her.

14.

The Pagan Pit was the Tuesday night hangout for a society of black-clad, musical mourners who considered themselves to be on the wrist-cutting edge of Athens. The club itself was an illusion, materializing once a week in a dank basement with the help of black velvet curtains procured from a closed-down funeral home, and cheap, brass candle holders in the shape of charmed cobras, which were bought at a small occult shop in Monastiraki. The rest of the week the Pit was a dusty blues bar called the Bourbon Ballroom, and the Bourbon's greedy owner insisted on standing guard behind

the bar on Tuesdays, making sure that no sacrifices, human or chicken, were enacted on his dance floor.

Like the final page in a tale with a happily-ever-after, Ariadne was instantly welcomed into the folds of the Pit, where she returned each Tuesday night until she was expected. The women who were not virulently jealous of the attention lavished upon the newcomer asked a thousand and one questions about life in Montreal, practising their broken English on her. They leaned in close to hear her replies over the drone of the music, inhaling the words as they emerged from Ariadne's mouth. They wanted to know practical things like how much her clothes cost converted into drachmas (a small fortune, they decided); whether there were clubs like the Pit in Montreal (when Ariadne described the high-ceilinged vaults where she and her friends went to see and be seen, filled seven nights a week with people so perfectly stylish they might have mistakenly walked out of a painting, the women sighed); whether the men were better looking than the Pit's slim pickings (they were stunning she assured them— not only handsome and impeccably dressed, but gentlemanly and seductive, smiling in a way that made you feel beautiful, not dirty, as they undressed you with their eyes when you walked past them on the street). Most importantly, they wanted to know whether Athenian ladies such as themselves might slip into a Montreal life as easily as Ariadne had slipped into theirs. Of course they would, she confirmed, with no hint of hesitation or sarcasm in her voice. In fact, as they stood there exchanging lives, in the alternate universe of Montreal, their twins were talking to each other on the phone making plans for their evening out. There was no need, Ariadne thought, for her newfound friends to know she had suffered. As far as they were concerned, she had arrived in Athens the day before she walked into the Pit. The women concluded that she was crazy to have left it all behind. "Why come to Athens? There's nothing here."

Ariadne had no instant reply to this question, so she just shrugged and smiled wanly. If there had been a reason for her departure, she had forgotten it, but more likely

there was no reason—no good reason anyway. She'd flown off on a whim and nobody had stopped her, not even her mother, who knew better than to interfere when Ariadne got an idea in her head. She'd convinced everyone that she knew what she was doing, and now she was here, for better or for worse. What was the point of regretting? One of the women offered to take her place in Montreal, and Ariadne informed her, only half-jokingly, that the position had already been filled, which made all the women laugh, though they were not sure why.

The men, who, as a rule, preferred foreign women, did not question Ariadne's reasons for leaving Canada. They did not ask her to dance, since no one danced at the Pit except, occasionally, the women with each other. Nor did they ask if they could buy her a drink, since such gallantry, whatever its motives, seemed outmoded in a place as hip as the Pit. What they did ask for was her phone number, and when they found out she didn't have one, they offered her theirs on bar napkins, on cigarette paper, on scraps that had other women's names and numbers crossed out. They also asked her to repeat things she'd said, odd words that made her self-conscious about her Greek. It wasn't that they didn't understand what she'd said, but that they liked the novelty of her awkward, anglicized accent, which had the equivalent rough charm of a German singing in English. And that was Ariadne's charm: she was familiar but foreign, a Greek woman with North American morals. What could be easier?

But Ariadne was not easy; it was Greek that was hard, both the language and the etiquette. It was too easy, she sensed, to trip over your tongue and make a fool of yourself if you weren't careful. She knew she should watch her words, but she couldn't stop talking even if she wanted to; it was as if she had just been rescued from a desert island and this was her first contact with humanity in years instead of months. She blushed whenever her new friends mimicked her accent, but no one, not the men or the women, noticed Ariadne's colour the darkness of the Pit.

The only person who remained aloof to her was Yannis, who skulked in the furthest corner of the club with a different, unidentified woman every week. He would sometimes nod at her in half-hearted greeting when she arrived. Ariadne nodded back tentatively since the group that she had become part of through the Pagan Pit was small, and there was no point in making enemies even if you weren't going to be friends.

"What's the deal with that guy," Ariadne asked one of the Pit's regulars, a tough girl named Sophia who had a tattoo of a writhing scorpion crawling up her thigh. Sophia's claim to fame was that she had slept with almost everyone in her clique—both the men and the women—but belonged to no one.

"Which one?" asked Sophia, ready to flip through her mental files and provide Ariadne with all the pertinent information. It was the least she could do for the promising newcomer.

"The one with the cheekbones and the cat's eyes." She gestured towards a ratty couch in the corner where, for the moment, Yannis slouched alone.

"Vissinos, the musician? Oh, I'd stay away from him. He's *narcomanis*—a junkie. He was really sweet before he married the white bride, but now..." Sophia shrugged and smiled sadly.

"The white bride?"

"*Preza*, smack, heroin, you know..."

Ariadne didn't know. "So he's addicted?" she asked, trying not to sound too naive.

"What do you think? Look at him." Both women looked towards the couch again, but Yannis was already gone.

"I think he gives me the creeps," Ariadne replied.



Like a spectre, Yannis lurked in the shadows wherever Ariadne went in Athens, and she began to run into him with a frequency that made her uneasy. Once, as she waited at the trolley stop on her way downtown, she saw him clipping along Venizelou Avenue near the intersection that crossed her small street, twisting his head from side to side like a periscope, making sure he wasn't being followed. Another time she found him in the shop of a man named Stavros, who imported the latest fashions from London. Ariadne was trying on an ankle-length black skirt when she heard Yannis voice, then saw his face hovering over her shoulder in the mirror. The skirt, he informed her, made her look like a village granny. He carried over a long, red velvet dress with chains hanging vertically from the waist, which hiked up the skirt like drapes. He held the dress in front of himself and posed. "Lovely, lovely," exhorted Stavros, applauding. The dress was more expensive than the skirt, and Ariadne hesitated, even though Yannis insisted that the red brought out the demon in her eyes. This was the first time he had ever spoken directly to her and the sound of his voice disarmed her, his words jumbling up in her brain for a few moments before they made any sense. She glanced at him through the mirror and then made up her mind. She wanted the red dress—any other choice now seemed implausible and ridiculous—so she paid for it without further hesitation and wore it home.

A few days later, at the trendy-dance-club-of-the-moment, The Kitsch Klub, whose claim to fame was its imported, old and tired, mega-lightshow from a formerly-trendy-dance-club in New York, Yannis spotted her in the red dress, alone, temporarily free of her entourage of Pitsters, and walked up to her. "What are you doing with these idiots?" he whispered in her ear. "You're not like them." He then walked off into the flashing lights and disappeared in the gyrating crowd.

Ariadne stood there for a moment, stunned, as if someone had shown her her own obituary in the morning paper. She tried to lose herself in the loud, throbbing music and in the babble of the other Pitsters, who had returned sweaty from the dance floor.

But something had changed and she could hear the emptiness of her own words as she talked to the people who she'd considered her new best friends. And it had been so hard to find friends in Athens. It wasn't until some force of nature delivered the invitation to the Pagan Pit that her life became recognizable to her again. (When a few people asked her on her first night at the Pit how she'd found out about their private club, she smiled mysteriously and said a little bird had told her). Was she now to believe that it was all a lie?

Ariadne looked for Yannis in the dark corners of the club, but could not find him. She grabbed her leather jacket and told her friends it was time for her to go home because, all of a sudden, she didn't feel well. She blamed the smoke machine that belched stale, musty clouds into the cavernous club for her lightheadedness. As she turned to leave, Yannis reappeared, manifesting in the insistence of the strobe light and the hazy air. He lifted a glass of whiskey to his mouth in slow motion and fixed his gaze on Ariadne from across the room. A shiver ran through her body and she wrapped her arms around herself, then turned away from him, going back to her circle of friends, afraid to cross his path. She launched into light, meaningless conversation with her club companions, but she could hear her own voice outside her head, and she knew that from then on, when around them, she would be pretending.

The next time she saw him was on the cobbled streets of Kolonaki, the ritzy part of Athens where all the infamous, gay Greek designers had their shops, and where you paid at least 500 drachmas for the privilege of standing in one of the area's many bars, if you were let in at all. Ariadne was pushing her way through the crowds that had spilled onto the sidewalks after all the bars closed down for the night, looking for a way home. Athens was in the grips of a month long taxi strike, and the bus drivers had joined the picket lines, some said out of solidarity, others because they were lazy bums. Ariadne was haggling with the driver of a scab-cab when Yannis tapped her on the shoulder and

offered her a lift. "Since we're neighbours." He was with a group of men she had never seen at the usual hang-outs; rough looking, older men unconcerned with fashion statements. She was introduced only to the driver, a large, unshaven man named Dracos, who wore a stained, red patch over his left eye and drove a very small black car. She squeezed in beside Yannis in the back seat, and she shuddered as his arm brushed up against hers.

"Are you cold or scared?" he asked, smirking at her and resting his bony arm on the back of the seat without touching her shoulders.

"Tired," she lied. "Suddenly I'm very tired." She was terrified of being so close to him, her hip bones crushed against his, but faked a yawn.

As they approached her street, Yannis pulled out a pack of cigarettes and offered her one.

"Don't smoke, thanks." She held her hand out in front of her to stop him. He lit one for himself.

"Funny, you look like a smoker. Do you do anything else? Anything interesting?"

From the look in his eyes, she could tell he was taunting her. "Turn down this street," she ordered Dracos, punching the back of his head rest. In retaliation the driver made a sharp right which threw her up against Yannis.

"What do you think this is, a taxi?" Yannis snapped. "Who said we were going to bring you all the way to your door?"

"Why not?" she snapped back, then reverted to English, her Greek failing her in her anger. "You brought me all the way here, what's one more block?" She tried uselessly to pry herself away from him and his smoke.

"You're very demanding," he accused, switching with her into English, and she couldn't tell if he was smiling or scowling.

"Yes I am," she concurred. "*Stamata edo*—you can drop me off here," she informed Dracos, who screeched to a halt in front of her building.

"Thank you and goodnight—*kalinihita*—gentlemen," she said. Yannis got out first and offered her a hand, but she scorned it and got out of the car without touching him. She threw back a dirty look as she walked towards her door.

"Bastard," she muttered, as she fished around for her keys in her purse, and Yannis walked towards her grinning. "What do you want, cab fare?" she snapped, noticing his yellow, pointy teeth for the first time. Not only did he sound like a vampire when he spoke English, he looked like one, and she'd always liked vampires. As a child she devoured vampire stories, and once even prayed to the gods to transform her into one of those ungodly creatures, fully believing that such a thing was possible. In the morning, after feeling her teeth and realizing she was untransformed, she decided praying was a waste of time. She stopped herself from smiling back at him.

"Don't be so American, Ariadne. I was just playing. I like a demanding woman. Keeps me in line." He held out the torn flap of his cigarette pack like a peace offering, his phone number scrawled across it. "Call me sometime," he said, sounding much friendlier than he had in the car.

She looked at the cigarette flap and then at him. "Yeah sure. Why not." She reluctantly took the number, buried her hand in her jacket pocket and crumpled the paper in her palm. She considered pointing out that she was not American, but did not want to prolong the conversation. What she wanted most was for him to go away. To disappear from the face of the earth, or at least from Athens.

"No, really. I mean it. Call." Yannis walked back to the car and got in, and Dracos screeched away down the dark, and otherwise silent street.

15.

Ariadne is lying in her bed in the dark, tossing and turning, scowling at a dream. She hears voices coming from her kitchen and raises her head from her pillow. She is

seized with panic and she shakes with the type of cold that comes from fear, pulling the covers tightly around her. Who could be in her kitchen at this time of night and how did they get in? She considers escaping her apartment to call for help, but instead plants her feet onto the cold marble floor and plods quietly towards the kitchen, naked.

It is daylight in the kitchen, blinding bright. She recoils at the attack of light on her body and it takes her a moment to focus on the faces of the two men sitting there. Yannis and Stavros are at her kitchen table clipping their fingernails and burning them over a candle flame, watching them curl up blackly like bugs, and laughing. They pay no attention to her until the door bell rings.

"Who could it be at this hour?" Ariadne asks both of them.

"Let her in," Stavros orders.

"Let who in?" Ariadne insists.

"My sister, Ismini. She's bringing us something we need."

Ariadne hates Stavros' sister and doesn't want to let her into her apartment. Ismini, who is a stewardess, has always been snotty to her, has treated Ariadne like dirt.

"No," says Ariadne firmly, "I won't have her infecting my space."

But Ismini has already entered the apartment with her perfect hair and polished boots, the metal heels chattering against the marble floor like teeth. She is carrying a large brown shopping bag full of old syringes—some are rusted, others caked brown, others filled half-way with fresh, crimson blood. Ismini walks past Ariadne as if she were a shadow and empties the bag of syringes onto the kitchen table in front of the men. The syringes pour off the table like water, and the next moment the kitchen is filled with them, knee-deep. The men carefully and methodically sift through the piles, placing the ones they want in their pockets.

Ariadne screams, "You're not going to do that in here!" But Stavros has already left the kitchen for the bathroom, where he is plunging one spike after another into his

arms, his neck, his feet and his tongue with the precision of an acupuncturist. Ariadne runs into the bathroom, but it is too late. There is blood everywhere—on the white marble floor, sliding down the mirror and the walls—and Stavros is slumped in her bathtub dead and rapidly decomposing.

Ariadne falls to her knees and starts sopping up the blood with a white towel, but the more she wipes away, the more there seems to be. She is crying and wiping, and soon she is completely covered in the dead man's blood. She then hears Yannis' voice from the kitchen.

"I would never do that in your apartment, my love." Over and over he repeats the promise, until Ariadne woke up in a cold sweat, pulled the covers around her nakedness, and went into the blinding light of the kitchen to make sure no one was there.

16.

Sitting in Medea's kitchen the next afternoon, Ariadne asked her friend what she thought of the dream.

"I think it's a bad sign. Give me that phone number, I'll throw it out for you now." She stretched her palm out towards Ariadne as if she were asking her to hand over a gun.

"So you don't think I should call."

"Could it be any clearer? I mean, you already know the guy's a junkie."

"Yeah, I know. I wasn't going to call anyway." Ariadne looked mildly disappointed as she slipped the phone number back into her pocket and prepared to leave. "Have a good night at work."

Medea worked in one of the bars in the seedier part of downtown Athens called "dog houses" by the locals. Her job was to sidle up to unsuspecting foreign men and encourage them to buy her drinks all night at 2000 drachmas a shot. The drinks she was

poured in a continuous stream were invariably non-alcoholic, though the bartender might have ironically thrown in a maraschino cherry . As the faux-cocktails flowed, the emboldened foreigner might attempt to cop a feel, sitting proudly with a hand almost cupping her breast. At the end of the night, when the man was presented with a bill for ten, fifteen or twenty thousand drachmas and the dead sober Medea slid away, he understandably felt ripped off. He could have gotten blown outside the Marriot Hotel on Syngrou Avenue for just 2000 drachmas by one of the strip's infamous transsexuals who specialized in that form of fast love. A giant blocking the door of the bar and slapping a nightstick in his thick palm made sure the bill was always paid. Some of the foreign men came back night after night, hoping to convince Medea or one of the other girls to meet them later, paying just as much for the fake cocktails and the pleasure of their contemptuous company, certain that they would eventually get their due.

Ariadne met Medea at her place of employment on the final night she cruised Syntagma Square looking for love. One of the lewd men offered to buy her a drink and took her to the closet-sized bar, though his intentions were less than gallant. He was a dog-catcher, so to speak, and he wanted Ariadne to join his pack. A woman behind the bar slipped Ariadne a note telling her to get out immediately. Ariadne politely excused herself to the powder room, where she reread the note, carefully pronouncing each Greek word to herself to make sure she understood, then bolted. After she had escaped, she noticed that the woman had also jotted down her phone number on the back of the piece of paper, but had failed to write down her name. It took Ariadne a few days to call the nameless woman because of the sudden storm that blew her out of bed and into the Pit. She wanted to thank the woman for warning her, but there was no way of putting it delicately, since what she had escaped was the woman's fate. She decided that a simple hello and a thank you would suffice and that would be that. Instead, she and Medea, who was also alone in the city, became friends. They met in the afternoon at least once a week, since all of Medea's nights were reserved for the fleas.

As Medea prepared for her Sunday night shift, dabbing herself with perfume, sucking on breath mints and pulling a low-cut blouse over her small breasts, she called after Ariadne, who was already heading for the door. "Aren't you going to kiss me good-bye, baby?"

Ariadne came back and gave Medea a peck on the cheek, but Medea turned her mouth towards Ariadne, then playfully smacked her on the butt. "How many times must I tell you that we only kiss dead people on the cheeks and forehead in my village? The living kiss each other on the mouth." (*Of course, this isn't true, but when is Ariadne going to go to Medea's village to find out?*) Ariadne kissed her friend's lips lightly, and promised to come by during the week.

On the trolley ride home, Ariadne went over another dream she'd had that same night, one she'd decided not to tell Medea. The second dream had no images, just a voice and question. The voice was Ariadne's and from deep within a black hole it asked, "Do you think I should marry Yannis?" There was no reply to her question, just the echo of her own voice. This second dream, devoid of symbols and twists disturbed her more than the first one with its sea of blood. The stark question had rung true enough to be a premonition.

Ariadne shuddered as she took Yannis phone number out of her pocket and crumpled it up. She poked her hand out of the trolley's window to dispose of the crumpled piece of paper once and for all, then stopped. She smoothed it out and put it back into her pocket. She wasn't sure why she kept it, except that somewhere deep down, it excited her. Or perhaps she didn't have the nerve to resist her own fate. By this point she had already memorized the number, anyway.

17.

When Yannis did not show up at the Pit two Tuesdays in a row, the regulars started to talk. No one seemed to know what had happened to him, but after much creative conversation it was decided that either he had flown off to England to record his long overdue third album or he was dead. A happy medium was offered by Sophia the Scorpion. She'd heard from Ismini, Stavros' stuck-up sister, that there'd been "an incident" and that Yannis was in detox. Though closest to the truth, the Pitsters dismissed Sophia's version, preferring their own conjectures and the imaginative possibilities they offered. In their versions, either way, Yannis was a hero. Even when he sat in the dark corners of the Pit, nodding solemnly and begrudgingly at those who sought his attention and friendship, the Pitsters bowed to his greatness. There was always the possibility that, dead or alive, Yannis' star would rise again some day, and the Pitsters wanted to make sure they were close enough to grab onto a glittering tentacle.

Ariadne did not take part in the various conversations about Yannis, but listened attentively, her face frozen in neutral. She didn't want to give herself away, and she didn't want anything getting back to Yannis before she figured out what she was going to do with the phone number, in her pocket for almost two weeks now, the crumpled piece of paper heavy as iron chains. It weighed her down, and, in the time since it had been handed to her, she'd dragged herself past dozens of kiosks with their vari-coloured pay phones to keep herself from dialing. She might have simplified her life by throwing the phone number out the trolley window on the way back from Medea's, then reciting jumbled and irrelevant numbers to confuse the sequence, to make herself forget the seven digits in her pocket. Then she might have been able to forget him, his mind-reading, and the dreams that she wasn't willing to read into.

As to whether Yannis was in England, heaven or the hell of detox, Ariadne reserved her opinion. She had the feeling that he was closer than anyone thought—at

least to her. She believed that if she turned around quickly enough, she'd catch him ducking behind a tree at the Royal Gardens, where she spent afternoons walking amidst the palm trees and ducks when it was too hot for siesta. Or if she ran onto the marble balcony, she would catch him darting from her building's entrance towards the sidewalk.

She received the first message on the first Tuesday after their Kolonaki encounter and the bloody dream, and the first Tuesday that Yannis did not come to the Pit. Ariadne was initially relieved by his absence because she didn't know what she would say or do upon seeing him again. Their relationship had shifted, and she was no longer sure how she should behave. Would she have to sit with him in his reserved dark corner, like the other nameless women who were never seen again? Or would she do best to ignore him and pretend the car ride, the dream never happened? A large part of her wanted things to stay exactly as they were, but that is too mundane for both gods and young women. Another part of her was disappointed not to find Yannis at the Pit because she would have liked to see the look on his face when he saw her again. Would he smile slightly and touch her arm when he said hello, or would he pretend nothing had happened between them? Ariadne would wait for a sign, then follow his lead.

The unsigned note was tacked to her door when she got home. It was written on gold wrapping paper, folded into a five-point star, the words scribbled on the white underbelly of the paper. Ariadne stared at the note without reading it. Instead, she studied the penmanship, her eyes following the lines of the upper-case letters, trying to determine their author. She felt in her gut that Yannis had written the few words, and she pulled the phone number out of her pocket to compare the handwriting, holding the Greek letters of his name to the unexpected English letters of the note, then 3s against Bs, 7s to upside down capital Ls. But it was impossible for her to conclusively determine that the two messages had been written by the same hand.

The contents of the note were equally perplexing—one simple sentence, which Ariadne did not understand, though a less articulate part of her had a feeling about what it meant:

"Let the downpour be stored."

Five words that were either a command or advice from an oracle. But what was her action to be now that she'd received the sign? What was she supposed to do? She considered calling Yannis to ask him to explain the quote's significance, or to ask him where it was from, but this presented a triple bind. She had promised herself not to call him; he might not be the writer; if he were the writer, she would be admitting to him that she didn't understand. And if she didn't admit it straight out, it would come out in the conversation that ensued. Infallibility, after all, is a requirement of intrigue.

Another option was to return the gesture, to deliver a few lines from a favourite song (*You can dance if you want to/ you can leave your friends behind/ cause your friends don't dance/ and if they don't dance/ they ain't no friends of mine...*), but she wasn't sure if this was the proper reply or if it was too frivolous. It is not possible to engage in conversation when you don't understand the premise, the parameters, the opening line. Furthermore, she had no idea where he lived, though it was supposedly close by. And she wasn't going to ask anyone at the Pit because then they would want to know why, and if she didn't tell them, they'd make something up anyway, and by the time it went around a few times, they would have figured it out. She memorized the five words and tossed the gold star out the kitchen window, where a breeze picked it up, and carried it back into the constellations. She watched the star float away and decided to do nothing.

She left the Pit early on the second Tuesday Yannis didn't appear. She wanted to avoid the gossip about him, which was this week's main event and was gobbling up the whole evening. She also wanted to catch the messenger red-handed. She had no way of really knowing that there would be another delivery, though part of her expected it.

There was no one in the dark and quiet hallway when she got home, but she was not wrong about the existence of a second note. This one had been slipped under her door. The paper was a different colour and texture: aquamarine construction paper, folded into an airplane. The words were written inside the sharp folds with silver marker, but the handwriting had changed slightly, the letters sloping up and rolling down as if the writer had composed the lines on a rocking ship. There was more to this second note, the writer, perhaps, wanting to make sure that his meaning wasn't lost on the reader, that the words would caress her deep within.

You glow like a firefly
Blue-green fairy
In my mind's blind eye

This message hit its target. Ariadne thought she recognized the words from a song. And they were obviously meant as a compliment or some sort of declaration, if not of intent, then of intention of intent. It was apparently her move. Ariadne sat on her double mattress and folded and unfolded the airplane several times, humming the tune she thought went with the lyrics. But Ariadne didn't know the song, and if it were a song, it hadn't been written yet. It was just that the words had slipped into her like a quarter into a jukebox, and the tune came out of her as if it had always been there, waiting to be picked.

She sang the three lines over and over again (What was the next verse? She couldn't remember), then slid open her balcony's glass door and stepped outside. Ariadne carefully pressed the creases of the wings, the nose, the tail back into place with

her fingernails, then, still singing, launched the airplane over her balcony railing. It glided all the way to the port of Piraeus, and nose-dived into a resting ferry's smoke stack, its ashes staining the eyes of stars, making them blink.

The next morning Ariadne bought a roll of wrapping paper from the corner store, prompting the owner to ask her if she was going to a wedding since the paper she had picked—shiny white covered in flat, white lace—was designed especially for wedding presents.

Ariadne considered putting the paper back and choosing some other pattern, but that would lead to further questioning from the owner about the purpose of the paper. Not only did she not want to explain, she wouldn't know where to begin. The Pit? The cab strike? The first note? When did this whole thing start? So she just said that, yes, she was going to a distant cousin's wedding in Crete in a few weeks (the exact locale necessary to the lie, or the cunning owner would begin inquiring about names, places, times.) She paid for the paper and rushed out, just as the owner began recommending the gifts his shop carried.

Back in her apartment, she sat at her kitchen table and cut the wrapping paper into rectangles of different sizes. She began folding them into paper boats in the same manner her grandmother had taught her when Ariadne was six. It remained the only paper trick she knew, and she still derived immense pleasure from the basic design. What she liked best when she was little was that with a large enough piece of paper, if she stopped folding after the first few steps, she had something like a pirate's hat. Ariadne made herself a hat out of the largest piece of wrapping paper and placed it on her head, but when she went to the mirror to admire her creation, she embarrassed herself and took the hat off, then went back to the kitchen to continue the process of making it into a boat.

When almost all the rectangles had been folded into boats, and her blue-topped table was covered with the white, lacy flotilla, she realized that she had not written a

single word on any of the pieces of paper. Perhaps it was because the same problems still plagued her. She still wasn't 100% certain that Yannis had written the notes, she was still not permitting herself to call him, and she still didn't know where to find him without asking around and blowing her cover. And if she could get all the information, with her luck she would probably be caught in the act—standing there, boat in hand, as he opened the door to go out for a pack of cigarettes—and forced to watch as he unfolded the boat and reacted immediately to her message and her presence. In any case, she no idea what to write.

Ariadne cleared the table of the boats and carried them into the bathroom. She filled her half-tub, and sat in the water surrounded by her silent flotilla, her knees folded against her chest and only her lower body submerged. She raised waves and stirred whirlpools with her hands under the water so that the boats bobbed in the storm, some crashing into each other, others sinking or running aground on the turbulent coast of the giant mermaid goddess of Athens.

After the last boat was eaten by the waves and the final cries of the imaginary drowning sailors had subsided in conjunction with the bath water turning tepid, Ariadne decided that the best course of action was confrontation. Next Tuesday she would not go to the Pit, but would lie in wait. When she heard the moans of the elevator reaching the fifth floor, the squeak of the metal door being pushed open, she'd pull open her door and hold out her hand for the latest delivery. What she'd say to the mysterious messenger, she did not know yet. She'd let instinct guide her tongue. She might invite him in, ask him a few questions about paper folding, then maybe she'd kiss him on both cheeks.

On the third Tuesday, despite her stake-out—her apartment dark, her stomach pressed against the cool marble floor—when the note arrived Ariadne didn't notice it. Whether it had come in during a split second when she blinked, losing sight of the hallway light that streamed in like water from under her door, or whether the fleet-

footed messenger slipped it in after Ariadne had fallen asleep at her post, she would never know. But in the morning when she woke up, stiff and cranky, she understood the reason she had missed its arrival. The bird, made of shiny white paper, was perfectly camouflaged against the white marble floor where Ariadne's cheek lay. Had its beak not been an inch from her nose she probably would have stepped on it on her way out the door and broken a wing.

Ariadne stared at the bird made of the identical paper from which her sunken boats had been constructed, her brow knit. She concluded that she was being spied on. She pulled the blind on the window that overlooked Piraeus and on the balcony door in the main room, then laid back on her mattress and began to carefully deconstruct the bird, memorizing each fold that the paper remembered. Inside a wing there were a few words in tiny script, sentences cut off at either end by triangular folds. In the tail she found two ends of a sentence, split down the middle then pressed up against each other so that the beginning of the sentence had to face up to the consequences of its end. Within the body of the bird, the heart of the note was divided into numerous diamond-shaped sections. Ariadne read each segregated section, moving from diamond to diamond in an order dictated by her attraction to the shine of a certain word or phrase: Beautiful. Died. Shut away. She pronounced these words quietly, barely moving her lips, and the loneliness that she'd betrayed returned to her, making her cry. It wasn't so much the memory or the feeling of loneliness that made Ariadne sad, but the idea that someone had divined it, had seen it in her soul. She began to reconstruct the white bird, her tears warping the paper and smudging a few words in her memory as the bird came back to life. She perched the bird on the sill of her bathroom window, hoping that by freeing it that she would also free her sadness.

The wind snatched up the bird almost immediately, sent it flying over the roof where it circled like a hawk, attracting other birds—sea gulls, sparrows, starlings—into its

dance; birds with nothing more in their bellies than a few skinny worms, black berries, an assortment of beetles and salamanders instead of this passage:

Like the beautiful bodies of those who
died before growing old,
sadly shut away in a sumptuous mausoleum,
roses by the head, jasmine at the feet

A passage intended to make Ariadne cry and yearn, and to force her out of her apartment if only to avoid the claustrophobia of the shut blinds and the incessant squawking of birds.

18.

Fate manifests itself through the simplest actions. Ariadne chased her fate, crumpled phone number in hand, willfully forgetting the dream of blood and syringes, and convincing herself that she was in control, the one with her finger on the dial, calling Yannis to be her faithful servant. The gods laughed as she walked through the streets of her neighbourhood that afternoon during siesta, praying that the old man who guarded the kiosk on Venizelou Avenue had not gone home to sleep. Ariadne quickened her pace when she saw the kiosk's open window in the distance, and she suddenly had the strange sensation that someone was watching her. She looked over her shoulder down the long, empty avenue, but there was no one there, not even at a window or sitting on a balcony. The sensation became more intense as she approached the phone, and she turned around one more time to make sure she wasn't being followed. The treeless street was still deserted, though Ariadne was almost certain she could hear the faint sound of laughter carried on the lethargic wind.

Ariadne placed five drachmas onto the red coin tray by the kiosk's window. A gnarled hand emerged from within the wooden shack, raking the coin away like the ferryman. She picked up the green plastic receiver and slowly dialed Yannis' number,

letting it ring four, five, six times in the apartment that she could not yet picture. She was about to give up hope when she heard the click of the other line being picked up and he was with her. A knot in her throat blocked her words and her heart burst out of her chest and flew off shrieking. She wanted to run after it, to flee the kiosk, the phone, and the bodiless, gnarled hand. She wanted to lock herself in her apartment and hide under her sheets until it was safe to come out again. If ever. But it was too late.

Ariadne had crossed the line that had been drawn for her in the dusty Athenian street. She was already on the other side and the place she had come from no longer existed. She looked around one more time, and though everything seemed the same—the empty road, the ragged white and blue striped flags flying over the supermarket across the street—it was not.

She brought her lips closer to the receiver and asked for him by name, though she knew it was he who awaited her at the other end of the line. "I'd like to speak to Yannis, please," she whispered, almost inaudibly. She was nervous and blushing, as if the phone call itself was an indecent act. The incorporeal man in the kiosk cleared his throat.

Yannis was not one to waste time on pleasantries. He knew who she was and that she would be calling today. He had received a sign, a mark in his coffee cup, an image in a dream. He wouldn't have answered the phone otherwise, it had been weeks since he had answered the phone. There was a long silence on the telephone line, and Ariadne suffered doubts. She considered hanging up and running but, as if she had been rendered immobile by some hex, she was unable to even move a finger. During the agonizing wait for his reply, her heart took pity on her and returned to her breast. She held it back in place with her hand and took a deep breath.

"Hello? Are you there?"

"*Edo eimai*—I'm here," Yannis finally replied, the sound of his gravelly voice nearly knocking her over. "What took you so long to call?" he demanded. "And during siesta, at that." Ariadne held onto the side of the kiosk so she wouldn't collapse.

The gods folded their arms across their chests and smiled smugly at each other.
"This should be fun," one said, rubbing her golden palms together gleefully.

"Send the rain now," another suggested, "this is taking too long."

There was a peal of thunder, but no lightning, no clouds. Rain fell out of the sunny sky in big, splashy drops as Ariadne babbled excuses about pressing engagements, job hunting, no access to a phone, and her Canadian ignorance about afternoon naps. Her teeth began to chatter, and she bit her tongue.

"Are you cold..."

"It's raining here," she answered quickly. "Isn't that weird?"

"...or scared?" He looked out his window. Not a cloud in the sky.

"Are you sure?" he asked coyly.

"Of course I'm sure." she shot back, the indignation making her feel like herself again.

"So do you want to come over..."

"I'm soaking wet."

"...get out of the rain?" With the tone of his voice, he might have replaced the word rain with clothes.

"Where..."

"Not far..."

"...do you live?"

"...from where you are."

How did he know where she was? She looked around for spies again. The old man who had been invisible in the kiosk emerged and began pulling magazines and newspapers off the racks, saving the topless starlets and the adulterous politicians from the downpour. This was the first time Ariadne had actually seen him and he looked

about a hundred years old in the light, shrunken in his baggy and colourless clothes, bent over, a hump rising out of his left shoulder. He squinted up at the sunny sky through his cloudy eyes and spoke, not to Ariadne, but directly to those mischievous gods.

"*Ti sto dialo*. –What the devil is going on here?" He raised clawed fingers towards the firmament. "Have you all lost your minds?" He shuffled back into the darkness, stacks of magazines and newspapers in his crooked arms, and slammed the door shut.

"Hurry up, girl," he yelled out the small window of the kiosk once he was safely inside. "I'm closing up. This day is cursed. Go home before you become its next victim."

Ariadne nodded at him, not really listening to what he was saying. She held a finger up to indicate she needed another minute. The old man dismissed her as a fool with a wave of his hand, but she didn't see the gesture. A flame flickered inside the kiosk, illuminating the man's ancient face. He took a long, laboured drag of a pungent cigarette, then coughed, blowing the smoke from his lungs out the window like a spell.

Yannis gave her his address, and she realized just how close he had been all this time. During the three weeks his phone number rested in her pocket along with lint, loose change and assorted bits of detritus, she had gone by his house at least a hundred times. If she'd tossed the crumpled piece of cardboard out the trolley window that Sunday afternoon on her way back from Medea's, it would have landed right on his front step. Even the airborne notes could have glided from her house to his within ten minutes, tops, as the gull flies.

"I can be there in twenty minutes if I walk."

"Can't you make it an hour?"

"Ten if I take the trolley." She looked down the avenue and saw the yellow electric bus approaching five or six blocks away.

"I have a few errands to run." He needed the time to recover from the nap she'd just woken him out of, to clean himself up and recreate himself in his own image.

"Look, you either want me to come over now, or you want me to come over some other time. Make up your mind." Ariadne almost brought up the notes as collateral, but at the last minute swallowed the words, reserving them in the pit of her stomach for a different type of conversation.

"For someone who took a month to call..."

The rain came down harder.

Ariadne erupted. "I'm standing out here catching my death..."

"...you'd think half an hour more or less wouldn't make a difference."

"And it was only three and a half weeks. Do I come over or not?"

Yannis laughed then, unable to resist, asked again, "Are you sure it's raining?"

"Forget it, wanker. Laugh by yourself." She was midway to slamming the phone in his ear when she heard him call her name.

"Relax. I was just playing. Come over now. I'll make you some hot tea and we'll go out later, get something to eat or to drink. *Endaxi?*"

"Fine, I'll be there." She slammed the receiver into its cradle anyway.

"Hey, watch it, girl," the old man's over-loud voice scolded, as his hand poked out through the window and dragged the phone inside.

"*Signomi*," Ariadne mumbled and walked away disoriented, but the old man didn't hear her apology through his grumbling. She momentarily considered turning back towards her apartment to change her clothes, to touch up her make-up, to dry her hair, and to find something else to do. But this wasn't really a choice, just a temporary subterfuge, like a plea of insanity; a caprice sent by those meddling gods then yanked away. Ariadne began to walk in the direction of his house and realized that it was no longer raining. She looked back towards the kiosk and saw the old man waving his hands toward the sky, crossing himself over and over, falling to his knees and pleading for mercy, then scurrying away as fast as his old shrunken limbs would take him. That's when she noticed that it was still raining over the kiosk where one small dark cloud

hovered, spitting swollen drops around the shack's periphery. Everywhere else on the avenue was completely dry.

Ariadne stared for a moment then continued on her path, and didn't look back at the kiosk again. If she were to tell anyone the story of how it had rained exclusively on her that day, they'd tell her she was hallucinating. She slowed her pace, not wanting to get to his place too early and have him consider her over-eager after all her restraint. She took exactly half an hour to get there, letting the sun dry her off as she walked, and entered his house fresh and innocent, newly baptized by the gods, as if she knew nothing.

19.

Ariadne arrived at Yannis' door and knocked boldly but not urgently, trying to keep her anticipation in check. If she had been a little older and wiser, she would have realized that even at that last minute before the door creaked open, while her heart hammered on her ribcage like the knuckles of a premature burial on a coffin lid, while her intestines twisted and mercilessly choked her lungs, her kidneys and spleen, that there was still time to escape; to turn around and walk back down the aisle which she had so gracefully traversed, leaving behind the echo of the preacher's voice, the bewildered groom, and the incredulous guests with their handfuls of rice turning gummy in clenched and waiting palms. She could have walked away from that door and found some other forest path to skip through, one littered with less broken glass, fewer rusted needles. A more conscious Ariadne would have understood that the extreme measures her body was taking were warnings of extreme danger of an archetypal nature, not the first signs of love (Though, admittedly, the difference is slight).

Of course, there would be no story, no death, no Nysas if Ariadne suddenly decided not to knock on the door. If at the last minute she decided to listen to her raging

instinct and flee: "Run girl, run and don't look back. Run as fast as your high heeled boots will take you, and be thankful for the boredom of the mortal. Fall to your knees and kiss its muddy feet. Bring it chicken soup and crackers when it's sick, fuck it on Sunday mornings and be tolerant of its bad breath."

But no. Instead she just knocked, and fate ran its proper course.

The door to the apartment inched open and a middle-aged woman, well-groomed but haggard around the eyes, peeked out the door. "Yes please?" the woman asked Ariadne in a quiet voice, looking past her and down the long empty hallway.

"I'm here to see Yannis. He's expecting me," Ariadne blurted out, then cleared her throat. The woman looked her over and Ariadne smiled at her, a shit-faced smile that she plastered across her face whenever she felt very uncomfortable.

"Just a minute then." The woman shut the door, and Ariadne, passing up her second chance to run, heard the intermittent rumbling of an angry exchange from inside the apartment.

Ariadne sat on the steps that led to the next floor, facing his door and willing it to open before she lost her nerve. The hallway light had gone off and she sat in the dark, tapping her foot, counting time to an inner symphony, something like a Bartok or a Stravinsky—nothing happy or soothing. When Yannis finally opened the door, the light from inside the apartment streamed out around him into the blackness of the windowless hallway, and he appeared to Ariadne like a the shadow of a god, emerging to greet her from another world. He was tall and rakish, dressed in fitted black clothing. His dark hair was pushed back behind his ears and brought out his razor-sharp cheekbones.

"Come in, Ariadne. Sorry about my mother. I forgot to tell her you were coming and after my second album was released, all kinds of freaks wanting a piece of me would come to the door pretending to be my friends."

"I see how that could be a problem."

"Tell me about it. The *malakes* took napkin holders, ashtrays, whatever fit into their pockets. Some idiot even took my father's dentures out of a glass while the old man was napping on the couch. Can you imagine that?"

Ariadne smiled and shook her head. "You can assure your father that I don't want his teeth. How morbid." She took a step towards the threshold, and he held his hand out towards her.

"Well, come in then. My mother's making tea. You wanted tea, right?"

"Tea's fine," Ariadne replied as she took his hand and squeezed it, then stepped through the door. She was a little more at ease now that their connection had been made, now that it had ceased to be an idea to indulge in or ignore. Yannis' fingertips rested lightly on the small of her back as he guided her through rooms filled with old velvet furniture covered in shiny new plastic, and into his bedroom. He then excused himself and went into the kitchen to get their tea.

His room was small, more of a music studio than a bedroom, a single bed in the corner the only clue to its double life. There were keyboards set up, various guitars leaning up against the wall, a drum machine with colourful spaghetti wires feeding into an amplifier, and a sound system with a record already cued on its turntable. Ariadne tapped the B sharp on the keyboard, but it emitted no sound. She then looked at the cued record and smiled. It was one of his albums. He wants to impress me, she thought, then sat at the edge of his bed and waited for him to come back and try. She glanced perfunctorily at the smaller objects scattered around his room: a *netsuke* sculpture of a man and woman locked in an erotic embrace, the bleached half-skull of a small animal, maybe a goat, and a few well-thumbed books of philosophy and poetry. She was more interested in the three photographs pinned to the wall—a couple of him with his band, and one of him with a pretty blonde woman, though she decided not study the last photo too closely.

Yannis came back with a pot of tea and two mismatched cups on a tray, which he set down on a speaker close to the bed. As he was about to sit next to Ariadne, there was a knock on his door. He opened it wide enough to bring in a plate of ham and cheese sandwiches, then shut it again without a word.

"Are you hungry?" He bit into one of the sandwiches and handed her the plate.

"Sure, I'll have one," she said casually, though she was suddenly famished. She took a bite of her sandwich, and as they both chewed, the first awkward moment of silence descended upon them. Ariadne glanced at him through the corner of her eye, wondering what to do next.

"Good sandwich," she managed, swallowing a chunk without having chewed it the requisite forty times in her hurry to break the silence, and almost choking. She cleared her throat, her face turning red.

"Have you heard any of my music?" Yannis asked. He hated small talk and refused to take part in it, even in awkward moments. Actually, he didn't mind awkward moments at all. They gave him the opportunity to watch people, to see what they might do.

"Nope, never." This time she made sure to wait until her mouth was clear of all food, because throwing up on his bedspread due to over-eagerness to swallow would certainly bring their meeting to an abrupt end.

He wiped the crumbs from his hands onto the floor, reached for the record sleeve and handed it to Ariadne, who studied his painted face on the cover. He then lifted the turntable's arm and carefully dusted the spinning record with a soft cloth as if he were polishing a rare and fragile work of art. As his music filled the room, he moved closer to Ariadne. He closed his eyes and began to sway as if he were experiencing the notes for the first time, in the initial moment of inspiration. Ariadne wondered if she should close her eyes too but she preferred watching him, like when she first kissed someone. She studied the angles of his face, counted the long, sparse lashes against his pale, thin skin,

and decided he was beautiful. Not in a way that anyone else could see, but in a way that made absolute sense to her. She thought he had the disturbing beauty of a spider reclining in its own magnificent web.

As for his music, it was softer and more romantic than she had imagined, nothing like the edginess of his cheekbones or his talk. She concentrated on the lyrics and found them to be poetic, though she didn't want to think about the woman they were about, perhaps the woman on the wall.

"I'm a lyrics person," she told him afterwards, when he asked what she thought of his music, not wanting to be critical on their first date, if that's what sitting in his bedroom constituted. She then told him that she sometimes wrote, and she recited one of her poems, all rhyme and self-conscious, that made him laugh.

"My little poet," he said and kissed her on the cheek, which made her blush. He then picked up one of his guitars and sang the first few lines back to her to the tune of a song he had already written, but she didn't know that and he didn't admit it.

I'm sitting in this little room
Talking to myself
Feeling like a tired toy
Placed upon a shelf

Conversing with the furniture
Trying to reason why
I have just been pushed aside
Left alone to cry

Ariadne clapped and laughed, then kissed him on both cheeks, close to the corners of his lips. He slid his arm around her waist and pulled her as close as they had been in the car that night in Kolonaki.

"Don't sit so far away from me. I want you close enough to smell the skin behind your pretty ears." He pressed his lips behind her left ear, slid his tongue under it, then blew lightly on the slickness, sending a pleasant rush throughout her whole body and making her nipples reach out.

"You smell wonderful, you know. Like a ripe fig ready to be sliced in half. Do you know what a fig looks like when you open its flesh?"

Ariadne nodded, then crossed her legs. She could feel her insides parting like a great red sea as he spoke, and she wanted to reach out and stroke his face, just as he was stroking her cheek, her collarbone and heading for her expectant breasts. But at the same time she felt herself spinning out of control—too fast to stop, too dizzy to stand up and leave, too disconcerted to separate fear from excitement. This made decisive action impossible. The damp warmth of his breath on her neck, the brush of his fingertips against her flesh, his essence entered her like a potion absorbed through her pores, a magical drug that filled her with longing, fulfillment and exultation all at once. She brought her hand to her breast, trapping his hand underneath and let out a triumphant laugh.

"What are you laughing at, my poetess?" he murmured, nuzzling her neck.

"I don't know, but I'm suddenly so incredibly happy. Can you feel my heart beat?"

"Like a giant bass drum," he replied, placing his ear to her chest. She took this opportunity to lightly stroke his hair, to push a loose strand back behind his ear, and they sat like that, ear to breast for a few seconds until Ariadne sprang to her feet.

"Come on, let's go out. Let's find somewhere to dance. Or let's just go out into the streets and sing. I have so much energy I feel like I'm going to explode in this room. Let's go." She pulled on his arm, lifting him off the bed.

"Let's go then," he replied calmly. He gave himself a critical once-over in the mirror and flicked a piece of lint from his black shirt as if it were a bug. He looked over at Ariadne, whose whole body seemed to be vibrating, her wide-open eyes shooting sparks.

"Not bad, not bad at all," he thought, though he felt a pang of regret for betraying the white bride, who made him feel that sensational rush of first love and desire every time.

Yannis draped his leather jacket over his shoulder and held the bedroom door open for Ariadne. He took her hand and led her out of the apartment, closing the door behind him without a word to his mother, who silently watched them leave from the darkness of the kitchen.

20.

"Where should we go? What should we do?" sang Ariadne, dancing little circles in the street without letting go of Yannis' hand.

"Let's get at drink at Babis' Place, in the square." Yannis began to walk quickly, as if speed alone could render him invisible.

"But no one we know goes to Babis' Place. It's for old men," Ariadne protested, trying to keep up with Yannis' pace.

"That's the point, my dear. I want you all to myself this evening." Without slowing down, he kissed the hand by which he was dragging her along. It wasn't that he didn't want to be seen with Ariadne, he didn't give a damn what anyone thought or said about him. He just didn't want to see anyone, period, not even his good friend Stavros. Especially not Stavros. Flattered by his possessiveness, Ariadne kissed the knuckles of his hand and asked no further questions as they clipped along, but twittered an operetta of everything that came into her head, an endless stream of ideas and impressions with no beginning or end, an ongoing, euphoric revelation of herself to Yannis. She felt so light as she walked that she had to look down at her feet to make sure they were touching the sidewalk.

"I'm sorry it took me so long to call you. I really wanted to call earlier but I was nervous. I was afraid of the signs. But I'm not anymore. I like the signs now. I'm so happy you sent them." Before Yannis could reply, she leaned in and kissed his cheek, then began to whirl like a dervish and sing the fastest and most absurd song she knew:

there are tins
there was pork
there are legs
there are sharks
there was john
there are cliffs
there was mother
there's a poker
there was you
then there was you

She sang out of tune and got some of the lyrics wrong, but Yannis wasn't going to criticize on the first date (which it had definitely become by now), nor did he want to interfere with her incredible mood. Maybe some of her natural intoxication would rub off on him tonight, and he'd finally be released.

They walked into Babis' Place, still holding hands, and Yannis was chagrined to see a number of Pitsters lining the bar, as well as many of his recent associates occupying most of the small round tables, edging out the old regulars, who played backgammon in the corner. Who had invited them? This was the last place on earth, as far as bar culture went. Yannis looked around for Stavros and was relieved not to see him there. He could justify snubbing everyone else—he owed them nothing. The associates stared openly in amusement at Yannis and the birdie he had caught in his claws, the plumped-up nightingale they imagined sinking their rotting teeth into. They would feed on her slowly, savouring her fresh, sweet blood, then leave her for the vultures when she was completely drained. A few of them smacked their lips involuntarily. Others were calculating that this ripe piece of fruit on Yannis' arm would

mean more money for heroin: hers. And if he were to fall in love, their friend would probably even be more generous with them. They decided to encourage it.

The Pitsters, on the other hand, had their own stories to tell and embellish and the news of this odd pairing was already travelling like wildfire through their clique. Absences from the Pit were added up and squared, diagrams and graphs were drawn on bar napkins, and equations with overlapping pluses and minuses were fiddled with until everyone came to the same conclusion. Ariadne was going to be sucked dry. They kept their distance so as not to interfere with the outcome. They turned their backs to her and watched her through the slanted mirror hanging behind the bar. Now that Ariadne had crossed over to his side, she could no longer be one of them. She instantly became a figment of their imaginations, a looking glass apparition. To them she was already a lost cause.

But Ariadne was unaware of her excommunication, of the fact that she had ceased to exist in the flesh for her friends, that she'd become a character in a perpetual, irredeemable tragedy. So it didn't even bother her that none of her acquaintances from the Pit came up to greet her when she arrived—she thought they were giving her space. As for the attention she attracted upon entering Babis' Place, the open stares and the guffaws from the sunken-cheeked strangers around the tables, she assumed that it was due to her glow brought on by the indescribable happiness she felt attached to Yannis' arm. But Yannis knew better.

After he decided not to turn around and go home, he found two seats in a corner near the back where they wouldn't be devoured by hungry eyes and vicious tongues. and then went to the bar for their drinks. As Ariadne sat by herself, glowing like a firefly, the sound of his voice and his music filled the room. Ariadne was ecstatic. She'd wished on a falling star, and had captured one with her bare hands. Yannis was a bit more practical about it all. He sniffed the drinks he'd brought back, took a sip, rolling the liquid over his tongue, then winced. He raised his glass for a toast, and Ariadne did

the same. "We can thank the music," he said referring to the quality of the whiskey in their glasses. "They usually serve turpentine mixed with piss."

Ariadne leaned over the table, grabbed his chin and pressed her lips to his eyelids, his cheeks, and then his mouth. Their first kiss was a long, slow tug of war where the will to conquer proved a stronger adhesive than the will to unite. As the kiss lingered endlessly, unselfconsciously, as the deities above clapped their eager little palms, pleased with their work, and as Yannis and Ariadne fused into one entity, one body, one heart, one brain wordlessly singing the universal lyrics of desire that all bodies speak, all around them the junkies and the Pitsters jabbered like Telex machines, passing commentary back and forth amongst themselves, running to telephones to find more people to tell. What was happening before their eyes was news. Persephone was being lured by Hades, the earth was trembling (or was it just the vibration of the sound system?) and was about to crack open to swallow the two lovers. Though this Persephone they noted, unlike the first one, went willingly, lifted her skirts and daintily stepped into the ground, holding lovingly onto her abductor's hand.

When the kiss ended it was dark outside and most of the customers had gotten bored with the spectacle or had cleared out of the bar because of the awful Greek pop music that was now blaring from the speakers—ludicrous Greek lyrics grafted onto the music from old American top twenty hits, "Staying Alive" becoming *Pio Dinata* (Louder), "You're the One that I Want" translating into *Mono 'Si, Mono 'Si* (Only You, Only You). It was the owner Babis' way of asking everyone to leave and it worked beautifully. It was Wednesday night and Babis wanted to go home to eat a late supper and abuse his wife.

"I guess we'd better go, they seem to be closing up," said Ariadne as a waiter turned chairs up on their table, ignoring the couple entirely.

"Yeah, and I've got some stuff to do tonight." Yannis lit a cigarette and took a long drag like a sigh of relief.

"Music?"

"Yeah, music," he lied. He needed to get back to his room to sleep, even though Ariadne's presence seemed to diminish the waves of nausea and the stomach cramps that hit him like buckshot in the belly. He walked Ariadne to Venizelou Avenue, flagged a cab for her, then kissed her good-bye. "I'll see you again soon, right?" he asked as she slid into the back seat.

"Sooner than that," she replied. "Why don't you get in?" She slid further into the back seat and held out her hand.

"You want me to?" His mouth settled into a suspicious grin.

"Yes. I do." For the first time since she'd arrived in Athens, she knew exactly what she wanted.

"Come on, buddy. Get in or beat it. I don't have all night," the cab driver grumbled, having no time or sympathy for young love on a Wednesday night.

Yannis got in next to Ariadne, and they rode to her apartment in silence, except for the cab's staticky radio whining an old Greek love song :

Kill me please
So we will both
be spared.

The cabby droned along with the song, turning to his silent passengers after the song was over. "They don't write them like that anymore. That man knew that love was pain." And he sighed deeply.

21.

What makes a young woman fall in love instantly with someone she hardly knows? Someone who she's had ample warning about from both the world of dreams and from her motley assortment of cohorts in the clubs and cafés of Athens? This sudden love would seem to be based on nothing, since earlier in the story it was stated that innocent Ariadne was not immediately drawn to the enigmatic Yannis, and that she was determined not to call him

(though the truth involved in that statement is dubious, given that she carried his phone number with her for three and half weeks).

One might cite the special deliveries as the catalyst; the carefully folded, otherworldly notes—the star, the airplane, the white, lacy bird—that appeared in Ariadne’s apartment carrying their prophecies, and that may or may not have been written by Yannis (who will address the question shortly). But Ariadne disposed of the mysterious and beautiful notes, not out of fear or indifference, but because she believed that the most significant words should not be recorded on paper but between the layers of the heart. She made a habit of shredding letters sent to her from home once they were read several times, as well as the short poems she sometimes composed to amuse herself once they were memorized. Not only did this allow the words to remain alive, to change, develop and grow, but it safeguarded them from becoming ordinary.

Then why keep the phone number since, as previously mentioned, it too had already been committed to memory? Because words can be paraphrased and still retain their meaning even if their rhythm is lost, but a never-dialed phone number is a precise thing. One inversion, a 4 before a 2, a 9 instead of a 6, and the possibility of Yannis would be lost to her forever. And the phone number is the only note that cannot be explained away or misinterpreted; the gesture is as clear as the seven numbers written in red ink on the flap, torn from his pack of unfiltered Greek cigarettes. Furthermore, it is the only message Ariadne can be certain Yannis has written.

Ariadne fell in love with the idea of Yannis as she carried that crumpled piece of cardboard in her pocket, clutching it in her palm when she walked down the street, her traitorous hand hidden from the light. In those three and a half misplaced weeks, she pulled the paper out and stared at it from time to time, trying to decipher Yannis’ personality through his handwriting, the shapes of his numbers, the spaces left between the letters in his name. Did the large gap between the two Ns reveal some hesitation on his part? Or did his own unconscious hand stop him, mid-scribble, confusing him as to what he really wanted to convey to her that night, perhaps not his name and his number, but his heart’s intent.

Numerology also contributed to the fatefulness of Ariadne's love. The letters of Yannis' name added up to the number 4, which provided a passionate and destructive nature with a tendency towards wild rage and melancholia—things that Ariadne found attractive. His phone number added up to 22, which was both her lucky number and her date of birth. If she'd known his date of birth, she could have looked him up in her well-thumbed reference book, Signs of Love to see where he fell on the wheel of Chinese astrology. If he were a Dog, she'd pass immediately, since Dogs were worriers, defensive and introverted, and she hated having to draw people out. There were enough Rats in her life, counting her pennies and sins. She hoped he'd be a Monkey, mischievous and quick, or a Snake, seductive and sleek. With those two she'd know how to play.

The piece of crumpled cardboard became the symbol of her desire. In it she invested the man who'd passed it to her with the power of her fantasies, with the allure of the unknown. Meeting him, then kissing him in a way driven more by hunger than Eros, mouths locked onto each other in a feeding frenzy that both drained and energized them through the transfusion of their animal spirits, that shot them up above the clouds where those pesky gods could keep an eye on their progress, could lay bets on who would die first (the odds favoured her), well, that was just the culmination of what Ariadne in the past three and a half weeks, based on a few equivocal notes and a fortuitous phone number that added up to 22, had already constructed in her mind.

The followers of Jung might label Ariadne's love a simple case of animus projection: the projection of Ariadne's ideals of manhood, created by her needs and desires and based on history, ancestry, myth and personal experience, onto Yannis. In the three and a half week hiatus, Ariadne was given the opportunity to fall in love with the imagined, the absent, with a male version of herself that happened to wear Yannis' face. Ariadne sang in her sleep to the animus she knew and did not know, forgetting everything at dawn.

"Oh beautiful Animus, with your eyes like mine. You have already lived inside the wreck of me and stayed. You have bled with me into womanhood and have loved me always. Oh perfect man, created in my own image. I am yours eternally."

The few times she had run into him prior to his disappearance, Yannis alluded to knowing her mysteries, to having penetrated her psyche. "You're not one of them," he stated, hardly knowing her. His words rang true and she immediately distanced herself from the people who had saved her from her unbearable loneliness. He was also right about the red velvet dress. She hadn't wanted the skirt and had only passed over the dress because of its cost. "Life is short," he announced, when she said it was too expensive. Life was short, so Ariadne bought the dress and wore it home. (It is irrelevant to the hopeful heart that Yannis' intervention that day in Stavros' store had more to do with the going price of a fix than with his fashion savvy.) Yannis already lived inside of her. He could read her and was always magically there when she required his presence. That night in Kolonaki, when the cab strike had stranded her, he appeared before her on the crowded streets and whisked her home.

So he had a few bad habits. Who didn't? As long as she knew what they were she was prepared. She could help him, she reasoned. She could rescue him from himself (and for herself) through the power of her love. Yannis was her other half, her animus who would finally make her whole, she was sure of it. On the way to the kiosk, her frantic heart beat not with fear but with anticipation of the moment when her life would begin, when she and the one who answered her longing would become one.

Whether Ariadne was Yannis' anima is not clear. He too had received signs. He knew that she was going to call and when, and that he was bound to fuck her at least once. But this certainty may have just been male intuition, wishful thinking, or a junkie's hunch because like hunters in the wild, junkies had to rely on a sixth sense which warned them about what was hidden around every corner.

Yannis' anima was more likely the needle held in the porcelain fingers of his perfect white bride. Ariadne was just a beautiful challenge, a diversion, a mistress who the needle

would do away with in time, just like all the others. She was his half-hearted escape from a demanding wife who would never give him a divorce. He didn't really want a divorce, just some new skin to rub up against for a while, a new pair of lips wrapped around his cock, a confirmation of his previous commitment when Ariadne proved to be all too human. When the affair became routine or problematic (as all his affairs eventually did), he'd go back, tail between his legs, to his ageless bride who would be as satisfying as the first time he took her on the night they were wed.

Yannis also had a dream on the night he ran into Ariadne in Kolonaki and dropped her off at her door, though he hadn't told anyone about it. In the dream he saw himself lying in a coffin filled with ice, vapor rising around him like breath on a cold day. His heart beat so faintly he was afraid it would stop, and he couldn't move a muscle, no matter how hard he tried, couldn't lift his head to see all his friends around him lying in coffins, the violence of their death contorting their faces and limbs. Ariadne, dressed in the blood red dress appeared by his side, weeping and clutching a small bouquet of violets, which she placed at his feet. She leaned over him and he played dead. She kissed his forehead and his eyelids then lifted her skirts and climbed into the coffin with him, skewering herself on his icy cock. As she lifted and lowered herself onto him, she moaned and cried out as if she were dying, and he began to laugh deliriously as his veins filled with new blood and his heart began to beat powerfully. His own laughter woke him from the dream, piercing his consciousness from the other side. Wish fulfillment or compensation? The Freudians and the Jungians are still pummeling each other in the boxing ring over that one.

But this can be said with confidence: Ariadne and Yannis ultimately had the same disease, the same illusion. They were perfect complements to each other both awake and asleep. For him she was willing to give up everything, to die, and that is exactly what he required of her.

Yannis sat on the double bed that monopolized Ariadne's sparsely furnished apartment, rather than on one of the red canvas armchairs, which sat delinquently in the corner. He sat cross-legged in the center of the mattress, claiming the space around him like some skinny Buddha on a lily pad. His face beamed beatifically in the dim light of the hanging lamp as Ariadne paced back and forth from the main room to the kitchen, carrying out small glasses of cherry liqueur, a handful of cashews, and a chunk of dry cheese with some crackers.

She dragged the canvas armchair out of the corner and sat facing the bed and the Buddha, who patted the mattress invitingly. "Come sit with me." He stretched his arms out towards her. Ariadne hesitated then took his hands and sat on the edge of the bed, her knees tucked under her chest, her feet still touching the floor.

"Don't tell me you've suddenly become bashful, now that no one's watching us. Or is it an audience that you like, my sweet?" He pulled her towards him covering her mouth with his, sliding his tongue over her teeth and gums, then plunging it deep inside her throat.

Ariadne pulled back and looked into his eyes, their lids heavy with lust. "I don't want to go too fast, Yannis. I wanted to spend some more time with you, all alone. I want to get to know you first. OK?" She looked away, embarrassed.

"What better way than to explore each other's bodies? Bodies never lie." Yannis clasped her to him, running his other hand down her back, over her ass, wedging it between her thighs. He bit into her neck then licked away the marks, leaving just the sting. Ariadne pulled away from him and sat in the canvas chair again, crossing her arms tightly over her chest.

"*Ti s'epiasé*—What's the matter with you, girl? You invite me here after licking my tonsils in public and now that we're alone you're playing hard to get? What's your

game?" He grabbed his pack of cigarettes, lit one, then walked out onto her balcony and stared over the rail at the ground, five storeys down.

There was no game. Until she had brought him up in the closet-sized elevator, opened her door and locked it behind them, and while he walked around her one small room, studying her few possessions without making the usual comments one makes when first entering someone's home, she was sure that they would tear off each other's clothes and fuck madly until neither of them could move from exhaustion and sweet satisfaction. But once she found herself alone with him, behind the locked door of her small apartment, and realized that the only other escape was a leap off the balcony upon which he now stood, annoyed and smoking a cigarette in silence, she was once again seized with fear and uncertainty. Not the same kind that she had felt that afternoon on the way to the kiosk, but a new kind of fear that was grounded in loss. Even at that moment, before anything had begun, she was terrified that once he had her he would leave her, and the thought of this loss filled her with the same type of panic that she felt in dreams where she was falling off the balcony, five storeys down, her arms and her legs flailing above her, grabbing uselessly for something to hang on to. In those moments before she crashed and shattered mirrorlike, she saw her own face and the fear clouding her eyes and she knew that when she landed she would be dead. She always woke up, of course, before she crash-landed in her bed, her heart racing frenetically, her sense of equilibrium destroyed.

Her logic was that if it didn't start between them, then it could not end and he would never leave. As she looked out at him standing on her balcony, and he looked back at her with a puzzled and disappointed expression (if he wasn't going to have sex, he would definitely need his tranqs), a tear streamed down her face and then another. She bolted from the mattress into the bathroom, the only other room in the apartment with a door and a lock, ashamed that he had already seen her cry.

He followed her to the bathroom and tapped gently on the door. He took a deep breath and cursed himself for chasing the young ones. When would he learn? "Ariadne? Come out, please. Come tell me what's wrong, Ariaki." The vein in his left arm began to throb.

Ariadne was mortified, completely humiliated. She couldn't utter a word in response. It was as if her whole throat had closed up and she was suffocating. She took a deep breath, trying to force some air into her lungs so she wouldn't pass out. She splashed cold water on her face and opened the bathroom window for the night air to revive her.

"Did you want me to go, then? Leave it for some other time?" He rested his head on the bathroom door. His hand was beginning to shake and his stomach to churn. He needed the bathroom more than she did.

Her voice burst out of her throat. "No, don't go. I don't want you to go." She unlocked the door and put her arms around him. She was slightly short of breath. He too was slightly short of breath, but for entirely different reasons,. "I don't want you to go," she repeated quietly. "I just want us to lie down together and talk. Can we do that?"

They could do that, he said, for a little while, and then he'd definitely have to go home. He took a deep breath, trying to calm his raddled nerves, his treacherous body.

"Are you cold or scared?" she asked, somewhat recovered.

"Cold. Come on. Let's get into bed."

Ariadne and Yannis crawled under the covers, fully clothed, pulling the blanket over their heads like a tent. In the seclusion of the tent, the world disappeared again, and they whispered and laughed, telling each other stories, secrets, and more than a few lies that under the circumstances were acceptable and for the duration of the night were granted the status of truth, never to be questioned again. They talked for so long, folded into each other, that Ariadne forgot her grief and Yannis trembling subsided. She

cradled him in her arms and began to sing the three lines of the fire-fly song to him like a lullaby. Yannis asked her what the lines were from and Ariadne, unable to see his face in the dark of their mole hill, assumed he was being coy.

"Don't be so modest. You know very well what it's from, *agapi mou*." The term of endearment slipped out of her mouth before she could stop it. In the darkness, Yannis could not see the look in her eyes and assumed she was just flirting.

"Really, *matia mou*—my eyes—I don't know it." He ran his index finger lightly along her thigh and she giggled. "Sing it again." He kissed her on the mouth.

"You're making fun of me, Yannakis." She playfully pushed his face away, then her tone became serious. "I loved the notes. They are the most beautiful things anyone has ever given me."

He licked the hollow under her chin, then slid his tongue over her jugular. "And what notes would those be?" His tone was ambiguous and, again, the darkness obscured the look on his face. Even the all-seeing gods could not peer into the private little world that Yannis and Ariadne were creating from nothing, though they already knew the answers to all the questions.

Yannis could tell by the way she was breathing that Ariadne was becoming agitated. He stroked her hair and kissed her eyelids. "Ah, the notes," he said, as if he suddenly remembered. "Where are they. Let me see them." He slid his hand under her blouse and cupped her right breast as if he were weighing a pomegranate.

It took a few minutes for the answer to Yannis' question to push past Ariadne's lips. When it finally came out it was almost inaudible. "I don't have them anymore. I threw them away."

"Threw them away, eh? You know the gods punish silly little girls severely for such acts of sacrilege." Yannis was biting his lip to keep from laughing, but in the dark Ariadne took him perfectly seriously and began to line up her excuses.

She told him she'd wanted to keep the notes but that she didn't dare. That she was afraid if she kept the notes that their magic would dissipate, that they would become ordinary. And she so wanted them to remain enigmatic and otherworldly, to retain their power, because that is what made them so beautiful.

Yannis was intrigued by Ariadne's actions, which were unsentimental, yet totally romantic at the same time. He wondered if she was aware of the contradiction, but instead of questioning her motives further, he asked her to describe the notes as she was struck by them, hit and run.

In Ariadne's imagination, the notes had been transformed. The gold star became bright as the sun, shining in her apartment in the middle of the night, inciting the neighbourhood birds and cicadas to serenade her as if it were morning. The blue airplane became the Concorde upon which she travelled to Montreal and back before dawn in her dreams. And the white bird became a winged man, a full-sized angel who had alighted upon her bed to erase the scars of her loneliness.

"You have lonely eyes," Yannis finally whispered, as if he were afraid of being overheard and caught in a half-truth. "That's what drew me to you."

Though she didn't ask, he then told her that despite what those morons at the Pit had told her about him, he was now clean. He'd quit, cold turkey, about three weeks ago, a few nights after he had met her in Kolonaki, because he had almost died.

He and Stavros had been driving all around Athens looking for the white bride, and had found her at a notorious doghouse, where the women at the bar were drinking more than fruit cocktails, and where the clammy hands of foreign men, as well as those of barbarous Greeks, were buried up skirts, down half-opened blouses. He moaned as he took her inside him and a thick, syrupy peace spread throughout his body, warming him like a heavy blanket. Then an odd thing happened. He began to shiver as if his veins were filling with ice. He shook Stavros, who had comfortably nodded off next to

him. Stavros looked at him through glazed eyes and smiled. "Relax, man. Everything's cool," and nodded off again.

But everything wasn't cool, and Yannis then did something he was not proud of because Stavros was not only an associate but his friend, and there was a code among friends. He reached into Stavros' pocket and took the rest of the junk that the shop-owner was saving for the next morning, the dose that would convince him to get out of bed and make his way to work. Yannis stabbed the needle into his arm as if he wanted it to go through to the other side, and his panic and despair began to subside. His heart slowed and he felt the heavy blanket cover him once more. He then felt her cold, smooth fingers on his eyelids and the blanket being pulled over his face. He curled up under the blanket and went to sleep.

He remembered nothing after that point, though Stavros phoned him the next day and told him that when he came to he found Yannis gagging, with blood and drool running from the corners of his mouth. Following their pre-arranged plan for this type of circumstance, Stavros dragged Yannis to his car, pushed him into the back seat and took him home, where he dumped him on the doorstep, rang the bell and ran. Stavros was a good friend, he told Ariadne. Yannis would have done the same for him. Ariadne nodded, pretending to understand.

He woke up in a bathtub filled with cold water and ice cubes, leftover from his father's name day celebration, which Yannis' sudden return had interrupted. His mother hovered over him with a pained look on her face, and poured the icy water over his head with a crystal punchbowl ladle. His father was pounding on the bathroom door and screaming that he was to get the fuck out of his house immediately, but Yannis ignored him. He had heard those threats so many times they no longer affected him. Instead, he locked himself in his sanctuary, put on his headphones and listened to his second album, *Seven Virgins, Seven Boys*, over and over all night. In the morning he asked his mother to drive him to the treatment center.

Another reservoir of tears burst and rolled down Ariadne's cheeks as Yannis' story ended. They were not tears of sadness but of relief because he had remained alive long enough to fall into her arms. She pressed him to her as if she wanted to absorb him into her body where she could protect him.

But Yannis left out a few of the pertinent details of his near-death experience—the prologue and the epilogue to his swift rehabilitation. He didn't tell her that, on the same day, his record company had dropped him with no remorse. No one had even called him in for a meeting to reprimand him or to issue a final ultimatum. A short letter was delivered to his door, received by his anxious mother, who was slapped in the face for being the messenger's messenger. It was a form letter that stated in three or four lines that due to budgets and timing, his forthcoming release—his "long overdue" third album—was being dropped from their list. The letter was initialed by an assistant secretary. This, of course, was not information that Yannis wanted to get around, since he had a reputation to maintain. He would write those songs soon, really he would. All he had to do was to set down his ideas on paper, put a few songs together, three or four, enough to entice a new record company, and soon they'd all be pounding on his door again, trying to sign him.

Nor did he mention that after his first trip to the treatment center he had vowed never to return, afraid that he would become *xenerotos*—without juice, dry—like the pathetic long-faced wimps sitting on benches in the center's waiting room. That was the worst thing that a person could become and he cringed at the thought. He refused to sit with them and lingered by the front door until it was his turn. He filled out some forms and accepted a bag of tranquilizers from a nurse, then walked out the clinic's front door. He would handle it on his own, he decided as he walked the streets of Athens, chewing on one of the bitter tranquilizers like a breath mint. He looked up past the layer of smog in the afternoon sky and told those gods he didn't need them anymore. He didn't need anybody. In response, a white feather undulated towards him and he found himself

thinking of Ariadne and smiling. He did tell Ariadne this last part about the feather and the smile, and her response was a long, grateful kiss.

When Ariadne and Yannis heard the elevator's gears cranking and whining, they peeked out of their cocoon and saw that it was morning. Both were relieved that they had survived the night. They closed their eyes, afraid to look at each other in the light, and slept peacefully, Yannis' head resting on Ariadne's pillow.

23.

When their eyes rolled open the next evening at about seven o'clock, they were both lost. Yannis didn't immediately know where he was, and Ariadne didn't immediately remember who he was. After a few moments, their grogginess was pierced by the sounds of conversation and dinner noises coming from other apartments in the building—plates being dropped onto tables, cutlery squeaking against plates.

Neither of them could find anything to say, not even a passing comment about the lateness of the hour, nor a comment on the discomfort of sleeping fully clothed. This speechlessness might have been due to the fact that they had spent the entire night talking about everything in the universe and they feared that there was nothing left to tell. But their silence came from another source. It was that frightful quiet before knowing. Ariadne and Yannis both sensed something terribly important was about to happen and the silence afforded them a last moment of meditation, like the final intense seconds before an athlete makes his or her first move to enter the competition. Neither one dared speak, afraid that something might be broken. They stared into each others eyes, not even blinking and then, without a word, Ariadne stood up, letting the blankets slide off her body like rain.

She went into the kitchen without turning on the light and returned with two new candles. She placed one at each corner at the foot of the bed, bent over and lit them without taking her eyes off Yannis. She then removed her rumpled clothing, one piece at a time, while Yannis stared. As shirt, skirt, then bra and panties dropped to the floor, they raised a small wind that made the candleflames flicker, their light dancing over her smooth skin. When she was completely naked, she spread her arms to her sides and began to slowly spin, showing herself off to him. His face was calm and interested and his eyes read every line and shadow of her body carefully, savouring the textures and details as if she were an erotic painting he had just acquired. When she'd completed her third revolution, she held a hand out to him and pulled him towards her, her eyes locked on his. She unbuttoned his shirt, her fingers sliding over the buttons like Braille, then unbuckled his belt. She took his cock into her hand, and began to gently stroke it, clasping his balls in a firm grip with her other hand. Yannis bent his head forward and took a nipple into his mouth, circling his tongue along its ridges until Ariadne moaned. They sank onto the mattress and she pushed him onto his back, still holding onto his cock as if she would never let it go. It was hers now and forever and, like a sandcrab, she would sacrifice a claw rather than let go of her prize. She parted herself in half with two fingers, and he wished there was more light so he could watch her lips devour him as she slid him effortlessly into her center, so he could see her different shades of red. Ariadne held him tightly inside her, like a finger in a newborn's fist. She arched over him, resting her breasts on his hairless chest. Still staring into his eyes she pressed her mouth to his, pushing her tongue into the back of his throat. She then began to thrust her hips forward, her hip bones striking his until their bodies burst into flame. The burning light of their furor illuminated the night sky like a backwards eclipse, and the gods reached for their sunglasses.

They spent the night entwined in each other while the flickering candlelight painted the walls of the small room with mythological landscapes. Persephone in the

arms of Hades, Echo longing for Narcissus, Theseus winding his way through the dark labyrinth until he came to the room where Minos' daughter waited for him in nothing but her crown, offering herself like a gift from the gods.

The candles shrank, exhausting themselves before the lovers did. They went out at the same time, as if in agreement, but neither the room nor the couple were left in darkness. The sun was once again rising, pouring its divine light into Ariadne's apartment, and only when they felt its heat on their naked flesh did they raise their voices in one death-defying scream that scared off a flock of roosting pigeons from the roof, and acted as an alarm for the mere mortals in the building's other apartments whose day was just beginning as Ariadne's, Yannis' and the gods' was coming to a close. The lovers shut their eyes, which had been stunned open all night, as hungry as their bodies, and finally sated. They slept deeply and peacefully, his head on her pillow, Theseus' buried in the crimped and perfumed tresses of Minos' daughter, Hades' resting on Persephone's breast until once again the sun set and the things that hide in the dark awoke to spin their exquisite webs.

When Ariadne opened her eyes again, now completely adjusted to the dark like those of a cat, she found a red spot on her white sheets. She reached between her legs and inserted a finger into herself then brought it back to her face for inspection; it was sticky but colourless. She then turned to Yannis, who she now instantly recognized and almost expected to find next to her. She saw a thin line of blood trickling from the bend of his elbow. Without waking him, she placed her mouth on his wound and plugged the spring with her tongue, until the bleeding stopped. Yannis woke up and found her with her lips suctioned to his vein, drawing out his poison. For a moment he thought he was dreaming, but in reverse. In his recurring dreams he was always the feeder. He touched Ariadne's hair lightly and she raised her head and smiled at him, her gums and her teeth stained red, the creases in her lips already caking brown.

"You were bleeding," she informed him as nonchalantly as if she'd accused him of snoring.

"I know," he replied. "It happens sometimes. But no one has ever tried to stop it before." He grabbed her chin and pulled her towards him. He kissed her and tasted his own venom. He grimaced slightly at the bitterness.

"I love you," Ariadne murmured between kisses. "More than myself."

"I know." He kissed her once more. "And I love you too, my light."

And then everything began again.

24.

By the sixth day, despite Ariadne's lack of a phone, it was noted by Medea that her friend was missing when she didn't show up at her place for their weekly visit. Medea made the cross-town trip to Ariadne's apartment, and sniffed at the door like a Saint Bernard for the pong of putrid flesh. When the concerned friend put her ear to the door, she heard the distinct sounds of lovemaking, first a gasp and giggle from Ariadne, then the deep and satisfied groan of some man—but who? She almost slapped the door with her palm, wanting to see the look on Ariadne's face when she scolded her for making her worry so while she was fucking her brains out, but mostly to see the face of the man. "Could it be him?" Medea wondered. The jerk who Ariadne had mentioned in passing a few weeks before, who she had that horrible dream about and who she said she wouldn't call?

"Damn that Ariadne. She probably called him the minute she left," Medea mumbled to herself. Ariadne had been over twice since that Sunday afternoon, and had not mentioned a single thing about Yannis, even when Medea asked her if she'd seen him again. "Hasn't been at the Pit lately," Ariadne replied casually, then changed the subject. Though this was true, Medea was sure she'd been lied to and that this betrayal had been

going on behind her back for weeks now. She poked at the elevator button, in a hurry to get away from the sounds coming out into the hallway. She could hear a conversation now, but couldn't make out the words. The tone was sweet, then salacious, and the whole thing gave Medea a pain. She banged on the elevator button with her fist. She had to get out of there before she kicked in the door, dragged the naked Ariadne out of her apartment by the ear, and threw her into the elevator and ravished her right there. "You are mine, you little tramp," she would yell while slapping Ariadne across the face, then planting her thin lips on her friend's soft nipples, alternately sucking, biting and licking until Ariadne lost control and opened up, her orifices puckering like the mouths of hungry fish. Instead, she kicked the elevator door. The sound resonated down the elevator shaft like the clap of a gong.

Medea's violence to the elevator brought Ariadne's landlord out into the hallway. "Hey, slow down," he said to Medea. "Kicking a mule only makes it lazier out of spite." Medea was embarrassed and said nothing to the man. At that moment a naughty laugh floated out into the hallway from Ariadne's apartment. "They've been in there for almost a week," the landlord confided. "They must be eating love." He sniggered then withdrew into his apartment to masturbate, but decided it was too much effort and turned on his television instead.

Medea shook with jealousy and rage. Once during a game of Truth or Dare, she'd admitted to Ariadne that she wanted to kiss her breasts, and left it at that.

"Big deal," Ariadne had replied, "who doesn't?" Her late-blooming breasts had brought her as much grief and unwanted attention as her formerly flat chest had, she'd said. Frankly, she was bored with the whole fixation. But Ariadne had no clue as to the extent of her friend's desire. Women friends had occasionally made passes at her back in Montreal on nights she stayed over at their apartments to avoid going home alone, but she'd politely turned them down, assuring them it had nothing to do with their

attractiveness and everything to do with her indifference to sex in general. "I'm in an asexual phase," she'd say, then roll over and fall asleep.

She had stayed over at Medea's apartment on nights when it was too dark and dangerous to consider making her way home, crawling into her friend's bed wearing only a T-shirt and a pair of boy's y-front, cotton briefs.

Medea couldn't get to sleep with Ariadne's bosom an inch within her reach, and those long, slender legs splayed out, opening everything up. Once, in the middle of the night when she was certain Ariadne was asleep, Medea reached under Ariadne's T-shirt and brushed her nipples with the tips of her fingers. Ariadne shifted a bit, but didn't wake up, so Medea became bolder. She slipped her hand into the fly, slid two fingers down the sides of the sleeping woman's clitoris and into the warm stickiness of her cunt. Ariadne shifted again, but this shift was more like an invitation accompanied by a short sigh. Medea took this as a sign to continue. She pushed the crotch over to the side and used her tongue to bring Ariadne to climax before working on herself with her hands and finally falling asleep almost satisfied.

Ariadne woke up the next morning feeling well rested, "Fresh as a rosebud," she told Medea.

"Did you have any interesting dreams?" Medea asked carefully.

"Nope. Slept like a baby right through the night. I should sleep here more often."

"Yes, you should," Medea replied. "It's nice not to sleep alone occasionally."

Medea said nothing about their nocturnal emissions, because part of her was ashamed of having taken advantage of her friend's unconsciousness. On the other hand, Medea told herself, Ariadne had come almost immediately, and this proved that her well-rested friend belonged to her. Even if she didn't realize it now, she would in time. The only thing Medea had not dared was to kiss those glorious breasts, fearing that the thing she most desired would be what gave her away in the night.

On that sixth day, shortly after Medea came to the door and found her Ariadne in the arms of a man, then stomped off down the stairs enraged because the elevator had been temporarily appropriated by the fish-wife to bring up the leftovers from the morning catch, Yannis announced that he should probably go home for a while to check out what was going on. He needed to work on his music, he said. Thanks to Ariadne, he could feel the songs coming back; a tune was already ringing in his brain. He had to go immediately before it escaped him again. But he didn't tell her that part. He kissed her tenderly and promised to come back tomorrow. She held onto him tightly, knowing deep down that the minute he stepped into the elevator alone and was whisked back down to solid ground the dream would be over. And she despaired, but she didn't tell him that, she just tried to smile. Nothing but everything would ever be enough for her again.

As the elevator door shut and he blew her a last kiss, she began to shake. Was she cold or scared? She couldn't tell. Maybe both. She ran back into her apartment and hid under her covers, balled up like a fetus, holding onto her stomach. He would never return, she was sure of it, and if he didn't she would die. Without him there was no life, no reason to live. She would wait for him there, in the bed blessed by the gods, for an eternity. She would not leave her double mattress in the middle of her pretty little apartment, not even to eat, for what was food without love but pointless sustenance, like keeping the brain-dead on life support. She did not move until there was a knock at the door. But it wasn't the next day yet, and it wasn't Yannis, but Medea, who had walked the neighbourhood for a couple of hours, trying to make herself go home and forget the whole sordid affair, but whose seething jealousy had won the battle. She'd returned with the intention of making a scene.

"Still in bed, eh?" Medea walked around looking for her rival. "All alone?"

"I had some company, but he's gone now," Ariadne replied weakly. "He's gone." She sighed and slumped into one of the canvas chairs as if her last ounce of energy had been drained from her.

Medea looked over her friend's body and imagined it covered with crescent bruises dispatched with a wooden spoon. She then looked at the strain in her friend's face and laughed wryly. "Poor pigeon. Rough night?"

Ariadne put on some clothes, made some tea and then told Medea about her six day odyssey in intimate detail, as the other woman sat pokerfaced, absorbing the information and watching the changing expressions on her friend's face without blinking her envious, evil eye.

In the retelling of the previous days' events, Ariadne immediately felt better. She threw her arms around Medea and kissed her enthusiastically on the mouth. "I'm so happy, I could kiss the one-eyed, village idiot! I love the world," she shouted. "Let's go out and celebrate!"

But Medea wasn't interested in celebrating, nor did she appreciate the shared affection with the one-eyed, village idiot. She knew him only too well. He was one of her customers. And it was time for her to crawl back into the doghouse to be felt up by smelly, vulgar foreigners and even worse Greeks. She left Ariadne in her apartment with her damned happiness, having wasted a day on her account, and went off to work vowing revenge. Against whom? Him or her? She wasn't sure yet.

At the doghouse, Medea sat at her usual place at the bar and unbuttoned an extra button on her blouse. She prepared to humiliate herself more than usual so her anger would have no opportunity to subside.

Left on her own, with no one to reflect her marvellous dream, Ariadne's spirits sank again. She crawled back into bed to wait for the next injection of life that would lift her out of her nadir.

Yannis was also experiencing a flux of emotions. As he walked home in the late afternoon sun, distancing himself from the haven of Ariadne's apartment, he passed the square where his betrayed cohorts gathered, plotting their own revenge. They buzzed around him like gadflies swarming a bloated cow.

"Don't you want to see, Yannis?"

"She's so fine today. Purer than a virgin."

"Here, just take her, our treat."

"We have more."

"There's always more."

"It would be so sad to lose you."

"Come back to us, Yannis."

"We miss you, Yannis."

For the first time in days his stomach cramped up, and the hand he lifted to brush a stray hair out of his eyes trembled. He then spotted Stavros, who was shivering on a bench outside Babis' Place and quickened his pace, hoping that his old friend wouldn't see him, catch him raw and unprotected between the gates of his two hideaways. But Stavros noticed him almost immediately and ran up to him.

"My brother, you have been away too long. Have I got something for you." He held out a small blue packet and smiled. "We're going to die a thousand deaths tonight."

Yannis averted his eyes. "I've quit, man." There was little conviction in his voice, and he hoped his friend didn't think him a coward.

"You've quit? Really? Well let's celebrate. One for the road, for old time's sake. Before you become *xenerotos*." He put his arm around Yannis and led him towards his car.

Yannis intended to just watch, to test his strength, his willpower. But at the sight of the needle and the bent spoon, his heart began pounding in his ears and his body

filled with that old, familiar longing. He tried to evoke Ariadne's image, her limbs wrapped around his waist, her heart beating against his cheek.

"I just spent a week in bed with Ariadne," he told Stavros, hoping the statement would work on him like sympathetic magic. "It was fantastic. Better than smack."

"Ariadne, eh? Nice going, *malaka*. She's juicy, but better than this?" He handed Yannis the spoon and the syringe and out of habit he took it. "To young love," Stavros toasted with an invisible glass as Yannis mechanically tied a belt around his arm, then plunged the needle into the hole that Ariadne had licked clean.

"To love," Yannis repeated as his former mistress welcomed him back, filling his body with languor and satisfaction in one breath. "Oh baby, oh you big beautiful cunt," he moaned as the bride wrapped her porcelain arms around him and bit into his lips until they were numb.

"Ariadne need never know," the bride whispered in his ear. "What man can be satisfied with just one lover? You can have us both for a while, I don't mind. But remember, you belong to me."

Maybe he had left her too abruptly when he should have eased himself away from her gently. She'd been so good to him, so understanding. He was lucky she'd have him back. "I can't come every day anymore," he warned.

"That's fine, my love," she murmured and closed his eyes with her warm fingers. "Just don't leave me cold like that again. I won't let you." She kissed him on the mouth and then went down on him. His back arched in ecstasy and pain.

"I love you," he gasped, "I love you, too."

Section III

25.

Saturday night is the worst night on Nysas. By decree of the powers that be (Thanasis), the Scat Club remains open one extra hour, until 4am, as if Saturday night differs from Tuesday or Thursday night on an island that follows its own Bacchanalian calendar. An extra hour might not have been unreasonable once a week anywhere else in the world, but for Ariadne of Nysas it is torture. Besides Petros and Tom, most of the other long-gone employees walked out after a Saturday night shift, leaving Ariadne to absorb Thanasis' wrath, since he invariably chose that final hour to blame her for her last colleague's sudden departure.

"You must have done something. You must have said something. Marika/Philipas/Selena was happy here. She told me so last week, yesterday, this morning. What is it that you said?"

Only once since she arrived has Thanasis thanked Ariadne for not abandoning him, but he was pissed drunk and sentimental. And right after he'd thanked her, throwing his sweaty arms around her stiffened shoulders, he called her stupid.

"Thank you for standing by me, Ariadne. You've made the stupidest mistakes of any employee I've ever had, but you've stayed. You're a friend," he blubbered, tears welling up in his bloodshot eyes. Ariadne might have ignored the remark about stupid mistakes had he not repeated it several times, like a toast, loud enough for all the Saturday night stragglers to hear.

I must be the stupidest employee he's ever had, she thought as Thanasis climbed onto one of the bar stools to continue his oratory, and then fell off. Only someone

stupid would accept the humiliation, the lack of respect, the slave hours and wages, and on top of that, the scourge of Alikí, that yeast infection personified. (Ariadne has begun calling her Candida behind her back, and the nickname has caught on with the other employees.)

This particular Saturday is the same Saturday that Rut fled Nysas heartbroken, the day after the phone call that sent Ariadne into convulsions. Apart from the fact that Ariadne will be stuck working for an extra hour, she has spent the entire day huddling in a corner of the Scat, hiding from the sun that exposes everything in its unforgiving light, hiding from Rut, hiding from herself.

What Ariadne is really avoiding is any sort of foray into the future. By sitting in the dark where no one would think to look for her, she hopes if not to turn back time, to stop it. If time is allowed to go on, the reality of Yannis' rejection will continue and grow until it is unavoidable, peering at her from alleyways and dark corners like a stalker. If time goes on she will have to face Rut and his insistent love, and she will have to accept that life has gone on long enough for someone else, not Yannis, to fall in love with her. Her months on Nysas have already created enough of an unbroachable chasm between her and the object of her desire. Not another minute, she thinks, must go by where Yannis loves her less and circumstantial strangers love her more.

But her premise that hiding in the Scat Club will stop time is flawed. The Scat Club, especially on a Saturday night, is all about endless, crawling time, from six sharp until 4am. The wooden doors swing open, and Thanasis sees Ariadne curled in a corner, her head buried in her lap.

"You haven't come here to die, have you?" He tosses his keys onto the bar. "It's bad business to keep a corpse in the corner, you know."

Ariadne lifts her head, and stares at him confused, as if she has just woken up from a nap. She has no idea where she is because the last image from her nightmare has not yet dispersed into a fog of translucent dust motes.

"How did you get in here anyway?" Thanasis asks, pouring himself the first of many drinks blessed by the Virgin.

"What time is it?" she asks, still disconcerted.

"Time for you to start working, my girl." A few tourists pop their heads into the doorway and Thanasis waves at them, then blasts the stereo to indicate that he is open for business. The blare of a trumpet shocks Ariadne, who sits just below the speaker, out of her stupor.

She has failed. Time had not stopped at all, it has gone on without her. The sun is making its meandering way towards its resting place, the bus from the beach is carrying the sandy, oily tourists who will later pack the Scat Club up to the village, and six more hours have gone by where Yannis doesn't love her and the dejected Rut's love increases proportionally as Yannis' diminishes.

"I've got to go home for a minute," Ariadne tells Thanasis. "I forgot to take my vitamins and I'll collapse without them." She has learned to offer excuses that are relevant to Thanasis' interests, since he generally forbids any departure after six p.m. A collapsed waitress on a Saturday night is not in his best interest; in fact, it would be a disaster. He lets Ariadne go with only minor grumbling.

"Hurry up then. Yesterday phone calls, today vitamins." The truth of the matter is that Thanasis doesn't like to be in the Scat Club alone with the customers before he is completely drunk. Before the Virgin's blessing takes hold, all he sees when he looks across the bar is ridiculous, sunburnt faces issuing inane, incomprehensible babble. At that early hour, all he can focus on is the bulge of drachmas in pockets and fanny packs. This has given him the reputation among some early drinkers of being slightly queer. It is only after a few shots of whiskey that he becomes one of the gang and Ariadne is forced to take over the whole place, pushing Thanasis out of her way so she can mix the drinks he has forgotten about. It is in those moments, when he loses control and is no longer in charge, that he hates and berates Ariadne the most. Precisely because he needs her. As

she shakes cocktails and rushes back to serve them to the thirsty throngs, Thanasis occasionally recalls the reason for his drunkenness. He drinks to please the thirsty throngs, but hates them for turning him into one of their ilk. So in the end, he hates himself, his drunkenness, and the loss of control over his bar to Ariadne, his stupidest of employees, who saves his drunken ass nightly.

Ariadne's real reason for running home is not to take vitamins, but to change out of Rut's shirt, sponge his smell off her skin. She throws the black T-shirt under her bed and jumps into the cold shower without closing the door (Ah, poor Kyr Georgis flirting with his goats and missing an opportunity like this.) She pulls on a white shirt and a white pair of pants that will be stained with Foreplays, French Kisses and Orgasms by closing—maybe someone will even spill an Ariadne's Dream on her tonight—so that when she gets home as the sun begins its treacherous journey back from the underworld, the passage of time and the scars of the night will be written all over her body. She cannot afford to lose track of time again.

When she returns, there is one customer by the bar, standing with his back to the door and one foot resting casually on the rung of a bar stool. Two heads taller than Thanasis, and half his girth, the man is someone she's never seen in the Scat Club before. As soon as Thanasis spots her shadow, cast from the front door all the way to the inner room, he jumps out from behind the bar and tells her they are out of brandy. He smiles at her as he makes the announcement, but Ariadne knows that this pulling back of lips, this baring of teeth is for the benefit of this sole customer. Behind the affectation lies an accusation: "You didn't do the inventory properly, you little idiot." Thanasis works hard at maintaining his reputation as a kind-hearted satyr, so he keeps the grimace pasted on until he has crossed the threshold into the light. Only then does he allow his face to relax into its natural scowl.

Ariadne slides behind the bar and looks up into the customer's face; he grins back at her confidently. She blinks once, twice, before opening her mouth to speak.

Here stands the man whose beauty she's admired from a distance since she arrived on Nysas. She has never seen him up close before and can barely keep herself from staring at his pale blue eyes, his full fleshy lips.

"He's a bastard, isn't he," the beautiful man says, breaking the silence and pulling Ariadne out of her reverie.

"Oh, he's all right." Ariadne blushes and begins to wipe down the bar, rubbing the same spot over and over again.

"Come now, Mademoiselle Ariadne. We all know him on this island. There are no secrets here."

"How do you know my name?" she asks coyly, though she is pleased that he does.

"The elusive Ariadne of the Scat Club? Who doesn't know you? You are too modest, my pet."

"I don't know your name," she lies. Despite her attraction, she isn't sure she appreciates being called "pet."

"I'm Daniel." He stretches out a hand and she shakes it, counting to three before she lets go. "You won't forget it when I walk out the door, will you?" Daniel winks and grins again.

Ariadne is about to spout a snarky remark about the uselessness of names but is distracted by a current that is traveling back and forth between them, filling her head with an intense heat that burns her cheeks. "No, I won't forget you. Definitely not," she murmurs.

"Good." He slips his hand into his pocket. "I hate this place, you know. I hate jazz and I hate your boss. He's the biggest jerk on Nysas. But I promised a friend of yours that I'd stop by, give you this." He places a crumpled piece of cigarette paper on the bar, and by the amused look on his face, Ariadne can tell he's already read it.

She skims Rut's note while Daniel studies her face, as if he is trying to detect a change in her expression. Ariadne does feel a slight pang when she reads that Rut has left Nysas, but it is a pang of guilt, not love. She feels guilty because she is relieved, and it is that look of relief that finally crosses her face. Daniel moves in closer to her and Ariadne instinctively leans towards him.

"Nice guy, that Rut, but not for you. You like someone with a little more of an edge, am I right?"

"Everyone's nice, the bad people are in jail." She repeats Yannis' favourite aphorism as if it were her own. It is then that her expression changes, Yannis' edge slicing into her. Daniel brushes her knuckles with his fingertips and she is brought back.

"So what time do you get off tonight, Mademoiselle Ariadne?" He is now a few inches from her face, close enough for a kiss, and she can smell his breath, a smoky mixture of cigarettes and the whiskey he is slowly sipping.

"Hah! You mean tomorrow morning. 4a.m. No mercy, no escape."

"Bastard." He touches her brow, then coils a loose strand of hair around her ear. "You're too pretty to have hair hanging in your face. You have nothing to hide; you're like an angel, all white and untouched."

"Come back at 4:30 when I'm down on my knees painting the floor. You'll see my true colours then."

They could have gone on with their own brand of obscure banter tinged with innuendo for hours, but Thanasis walks back into the bar holding two gallon bottles of brandy.

"You're out to poison them, Thanasis," Daniel jokes as he swallows the last drops of his whiskey, then throws two hundred drachmas onto the bar.

"But that's what they come here for. By the third drink they can't tell ouzo from banana liqueur. Why waste the good stuff? Nobody does." Despite his effort at jocularitas, Thanasis sounds slightly defensive.

"Bless the Virgin," Daniel replies. Then to Ariadne with a look of mutual understanding, "Mademoiselle, I will see you again." He turns to go and she follows him to the door, pretending to straighten tablecloths, line up the squat stools in militaristic rows. She stands at the Scat's door and looks around; she sees Daniel waiting for her a few steps away.

"I know a good place to swim where no one else goes. I'll take you there next week if you'd like. I'll have more time next week."

"Sure, why not," she replies quickly. Given the events of the past two days, she could use some distraction, and what a pleasant distraction Daniel might be. It will also be good to get away from Anthemusa, where she always feels as if she is at work.

"Meet me here next Friday at noon." He smiles and squeezes her hand. "And don't forget my name."

When Ariadne turns around, she bumps into Thanasis, who is standing directly behind her. "What happened to the other guy, the Hollander. Did you dispose of him along with your sanitary napkins?"

"Mind your own fucking business, Thanasis." She pushes past him and pours herself a soda water out of a stubby bottle, then takes a gulp. "You're disgusting."

"Listen here, you're my employee and it's my business when you start fucking the husbands of my business associates."

"I'm not fucking anyone's husband." Her brow furrows slightly at this new piece of information.

"*Monsieur's* wife's part Armenian, you know. And she knows how to cast the evil eye, *Mademoiselle*."

Ariadne rolls her eyes and shakes her head. "I don't believe in that evil eye crap. I'm from Canada, you know."

Thanasis begins mimicking her, prancing through the bar, gazing into the mirror and pursing his lips. "In Canada we have vacuum cleaners, in Canada we only work

five days a week, in Canada we don't believe in the evil eye." He returns to his territory behind the bar. "Well this isn't Canada, girlie, so don't say I didn't warn you."

Someone taps Ariadne on the shoulder. It is her first real customer of the evening, an American doctor fond of Tequila Sunrises and bad jokes. She says hello to him and Thanasis waves him over to the bar. "Come in, *filé*—friend." As the doctor walks past Ariadne, he pinches her ass, then laughs at the nightly affront which no amount of protest from Ariadne seems to discourage. When he is comfortably perched on a stool, his back towards her, his clammy palms clasped around his first drink of the long night, Ariadne settles her gaze on the back of his head and sends telepathic curses his way—her own version of the evil eye.

26.

A few words on the nature of distraction:

It may seem improbable or even inappropriate that Ariadne, so soon after Rut's declaration of love and Yannis' declaration of hate, could experience intense feelings of desire for Daniel, whom she has observed from a distance and whom she considers beautiful. A young woman truly trapped in the lovely depths of despair and unanswerable heartache would not be shooting sparks at another man, a married one at that.

This attraction to the beautiful, married Daniel might be interpreted as a self-fulfilling prophecy, another step down into the spiral of self-destruction. But it is not. It is distraction Ariadne is after, pure and simple. Harmless distraction from a life she no longer wants to look in the eye—evil or otherwise.

An ironist might choose to point out that it was the pursuit of harmless distraction that got Ariadne into the mess she's in in the first place. She wanted distraction from the boredom of her pleasant little life in Montreal, so she moved to Greece. In Athens she craved distraction from her abject loneliness, so she went to the Pagan Pit. Then she sought further distraction

from the shallowness of the Pitsters, so she called Yannis. And of course, distraction from the tragedy of Yannis has brought her to the island of supreme distraction. Every person who sets foot on Nysas is looking for distraction: from nagging wives and impotent husbands, from the drudgery of jobs that run fifty weeks a year with no respite, from the disappointment that their life has become.

Accordingly, in the same manner that past life regressions resurrect kings, queens and nobles but no shovellers of shit for the royal herds, Nysas creates town administrators out of trash collectors (though the difference here is slight); celebrities out of salesclerks (who, after all, would recognize the creme of Copenhagen, the swing set of Sarajevo, the brightest stars of Budapest?); poets out of postcard writers, and prima ballerinas out of honky-tonk hoofers. For the limited time of their stay on Nysas, its visitors are permitted to distract themselves from their reality in any way they choose, to live out their dreams unfettered by the loathsome responsibility of making them come true.

Ariadne is looking for distraction in the supreme place of distraction. But since this place of distraction is now her home, she must reach far down into the world of dreams and illusion to be equally distracted as those people who are just passing through. Most visitors to Nysas are lucky enough to stay a few weeks and then be rescued from their dangerous fantasies, their break with life. They get to go home. For Ariadne the fantasy does not only have to be maintained, it has to be inflated daily, the stakes have to be raised. That is one of the reasons she has only involved herself with foreigners. Upon their departure she can dream herself into their real lives in faraway lands, or she can kill them off mercilessly with the swing of a labrys and forget they ever existed. In Ariadne's fantasy world she is a conqueror and an unsurpassed lover, in the tradition of Alexander the Great. Through her liaisons with foreign men, she becomes the all powerful ruler of France, England, Italy and Sweden. Only Holland did not fall because Rut, that idiot, insisted on being more than a distraction, and for that reason he had to die.

Ariadne is in need of a new type of distraction--different from the old type that has worked so well for her up until now. Due to the aftershock of Yannis' phone call, the new distraction must be even more intense, more fanciful and dangerous. Her new drug has to be stronger than Yannis', stronger than the tranquilizers that grant him temporary death, and which are meant to help him go clean.

Ariadne doesn't want to go clean. She wants to get dirtier and dirtier, as dirty as he's accused her of being. But for this her strategy has to change. Pursuing the beautiful, married Daniel is like pushing shards of glass into the soles of her feet to forget that her stomach hurts. It is a welcome pain because it is a new and unknown pain. It serves as a distraction for the old pain that she knows too well.

Before concluding this discussion on the nature of distraction, which has temporarily distracted from the story at hand, but has hopefully shed some light on the recent actions of Ariadne, there is one more point to make.

The world keeps turning because of distraction. Everyone would be doomed, lost without it. Without the distraction of Ariadne, Yannis would have to take a good look at himself: at how his insides are rotting, his teeth falling out, and his dreams of becoming a musical messiah falling further and further out of his reach as the days pass, as the needle--the ultimate distraction--makes more holes in his body through which they can pour out.

Daniel would have to look at the face of his wife every morning and accept the reality of life with a woman whom he no longer desires, whom he makes more bitter each day through his blatant philandering on Nysas. When she kisses him at daybreak on his beautiful lips, he is poisoned by the bile he has created in her. Daniel needs the distraction of Ariadne, the freshness of her breath, to breathe new life into his deflating dream. Without her he would be forced to accept the acidity of his fate.

Even the daughter of Minos, bored with the rituals and responsibilities of a princess, turned to Theseus for distraction, and he looked to her for the same thing. But his distraction

led him to glory while hers paved the way for the destruction of everything she held close to her heart, including her obsessive, passionate love for him.

27.

Ariadne walks through the village in a pair of billowing grey pants, cinched at the waist by a black leather belt, tied not buckled as the season's fashion demands. She is barefoot and takes pleasure in the warmth of the stone path under her feet as she gingerly steps over pebbles and bits of broken glass. July has brought a wave of back to nature sentimentality to Nysas along with the heat. Humankind was not born to walk Nysas' paths in shoes, the proponents of the movement proclaim while stretching out on walls and tables and swinging their dirt-encrusted feet in the faces of passing strangers.

For all its natural beauty, Nysas is the antithesis of nature—man-made pleasure pouring out of every doorway. If the man-made diversions didn't exist on Nysas, let's face it, there would very few tourists perambulating its curved and narrow walkways. The people who come to Nysas aren't looking for a natural high. What they want is the relative comfort of home with a few extras: the sun, the sand, the sea. The biggest bonus Nysas offers is the opportunity to expand sexual horizons, to screw all the countries that have screwed yours. Europe is like that, Ariadne has often thought while watching the cross-cultural flirtation going on in the square. One big vendetta. On Nysas sex is invasion, piracy and spoils, with all the jewels lying naked on the long white beach, waiting to be plundered. What fun is nature compared to the adrenaline of war? During times of war it is unsafe to traverse Nysas's donkey paths without armour.

A tiny piece of glass embeds itself in the ball of Ariadne's foot. She winces as she hobbles to the nearest café table to inspect the dirty, bleeding foot, the underbelly of her pumiced toe-knuckles and her polished nails. As she sits there poking at the sliver with her fingernail, Daniel sits down next to her and takes her foot in his hand as if he

were about to slip on a glass slipper rather than pick out a piece of glass. He looks around quickly to make sure his wife is not in shooting distance.

In the few days since they officially met at the Scat Club, Ariadne discreetly asked around and found out all she could about this beautiful man with the pale blue eyes that she wanted to drown in. He had been snagged, she was told, by a Greek woman named Maria, a bleached-blond bitch who was neither charming nor pleasant. She had been both when Daniel first met her, but bringing him and his beauty to Nysas aged her quickly, made her face settle into a hardness that did her no favours. Besides, bleaching out their natural darkness always does something nasty to the temperament of Greek women. Ariadne knows who Maria is. She'd walked into her leather store once, the first time she came to Nysas, but now avoids even walking past the little alleyway where it is tucked. It is not fear of the evil eye that keeps Ariadne away, but a combination of decorum and denial.

It is easy to imagine that when Maria and Daniel first met in Holland it was she, with her accent, her then dark hair, and the stories of her far away, idyllic island, who was exotic and unique. Daniel spontaneously fell in love with her in frigid and polite Amsterdam, or at least with what she represented: warmth, joy, and freedom in the land where the gods still resided. He convinced her to marry him and take him with her to the magical place she described to him on nights when snow fell thickly onto the frozen canals.

But the moment they landed in Greece and took the ferry to Nysas, Maria began to fade into a landscape populated by other dark-haired beauties, more exotic and unique than she, not to mention the steady stream of international beauties. In context, Maria was not all that impressive; just another Greek woman who was destined to grow bottom-heavy and bitter. The blonde hair was one of her failed attempts to win back his favour, but it just made her look green.

Daniel strokes Ariadne's toes with his little finger. "You shouldn't walk barefoot, my pet. Your feet are too pretty." His hand slowly moves up to her ankle. "That stupidity is for tourists. You should be carried by Nubian slaves, like a princess."

Ariadne smiles, ignoring the part about stupidity in favour of the part about pretty feet and Nubian slaves.

"This is going to hurt," he warns, as he pulls out a pocket knife and prepares to dig into her sole. Ariadne holds onto his shoulders and looks down at his long lashes, the bridge of his nose, and when the knife enters her flesh, she doesn't feel a thing, except for a tingly sensation where his hand holds her foot. "Go home and clean it now," he orders and helps her up. He accompanies her to Kyr Georgis' as she hops along the donkey path on one foot, dripping a trail of blood for the hounds to follow from the square all the way to her door. He stands on her balcony for a few minutes, shuffling around and wanting to step over the threshold into the cool, privacy of her small room, but resisting and staying on his side of the line. There will be time for that, perhaps next week when his wife is out of town, but not now. They stare at each other longingly. It is no secret between them that they want each other. As a matter of fact, half the island already knows, including Maria, who is also in denial.

Daniel reminds Ariadne of their date the next Friday and reluctantly turns to go just as Karina emerges from the cheese room. She gives Daniel a sideways glance as they greet each other. He turns to wave good-bye to Ariadne, who is leaning over her balcony, then walks off, a little slouchy from behind, but nevertheless beautiful.

"Watch out for him," Karina warns. "His wife is part Armenian, and she knows how to cast the evil eye." Ariadne rolls her eyes and goes into the bathroom to rinse her wound. Karina runs up to the balcony and follows her into the stall. "Don't make those faces. The *Daneza* he was after last month was suddenly afflicted with the runs, and

couldn't leave her room for five days. She was afraid if she went to the beach she'd shit on someone as she walked by."

Ariadne laughs. "Where do you and Thanasis get your information. "

"Don't laugh, Ariadne. Diarrhea is the number one punishment of the evil eye. Maybe someone can cast it on Thanasis, that asshole." She spits on the ground in disgust.

"Thanasis' already got it. And I think diarrhea's the number one punishment for too many tequila slammers and toasted sandwiches at 3am. Besides, nothing is going on between me and Daniel." She smiles to herself as she applies the bandage to her foot.

"Walking around barefoot again. Serves you right." Karina snaps at her and turns to leave.

"Hey, why are you so pissed off at me?" Ariadne calls after her. "It's not like you haven't done worse."

"It's not bad enough that he's married," Karina replies curtly, "but he's a junkie, in case you were wondering. And I thought you were through with all that."

Ariadne says nothing more. Death has once again pulled its shroud over the sun and everything has gone dark. She suddenly feels tired and drained. She goes into her room and lies down. She puts on her headphones and hears death singing to her in that familiar voice. She lies there all afternoon, staring blankly at spiders dangling from their dusty webs on her ceiling.

28.

Friday arrives before Ariadne has the time or the desire to cancel her date with Daniel. She prepares carefully for their meeting, clipping and buffing her toenails, and trimming the snarled jungle between her legs. Ariadne wears a g-string to the beach, not out of modesty but because there are some places where sand does not belong. The

moment the practical decision of wearing a g-string is made, aesthetic details like stray pubic hairs sprouting out of the bikini line have to be considered. Only the naked are truly free, she thinks as she pokes herself with her nail scissors and curses.

Next she braids her long, black hair into as many braids as she can manage on her own (seven), inspects herself carefully in the slab of broken mirror that hangs by a string next to her bed, then starts towards the designated meeting place at a deliberately even and leisurely pace.

As she rounds the corner, she sees Daniel leaning up against a white wall waiting for her, smoking a cigarette and looking at nothing in particular. He is wearing black baggy shorts, leather sandals and nothing else. Ariadne admires his long, sleek torso and sighs. When he sees her approaching with her braids wriggling around her head, his face crinkles in a smile.

"Good morning, Ariadne. I hope you slept well."

"Like moon jelly floating on a calm sea." She doesn't know why she said this, it is nowhere near the truth. She tossed and turned all night as if caught in a whirlpool and she woke herself up several times with her own screams. But if she is to remain adequately distracted, if the illusion they are building together is to be kept healthy and whole, there is no room for the truth, the nightmares, the recurring images of blood that fill her few hours of sleep every night. In this new situation with the godlike Daniel, she has to be a virgin offering herself for the slaughter, not a used and bloody rag that has been tossed aside by someone else. "So where's this private beach of yours. Not too far, I hope."

"You've passed it a hundred times. I have seen you and your lovers go by, but you haven't seen me." Ariadne says nothing to this. What could she say that wouldn't give her away?

As they weave through the village, they keep enough distance between their bodies for a plump child to squeeze into. This measure is less out of the need to appear

as if their meeting is coincidental than to prevent themselves from slipping into an alleyway and rutting like crazed animals up against a wall. They walk by the Snakeskin and Ketí raises her eyebrows in amusement. "What have we here?" Both Ariadne and Daniel greet Ketí perfunctorily without slowing their pace.

Once they've stepped through the village gates and are safely out of town, Daniel rests his hand on the small of Ariadne's back and guides her towards the donkey tracks. At the bottom, he points to a dirt road that winds along a hill to the left of the port. Ariadne has walked this road many times on days she's had the energy for it because at the end of it lies Cythera, a small beach less popular than Anthemusa. The smaller beach is frequented by that rare class of tourists to the island: the minority who are looking for peace and tranquillity and who are not too hung over to find it.

Halfway to Cythera, Daniel stops by a large rock that juts out onto the dirt road and takes off his sandals. "It's behind here. Take off your sandals so you don't slip." Ariadne removes her sandals and peeks around the rock. There is a steep, narrow path carved into the side of the hill, leading to an expanse of flat smooth rock that reaches out like an open hand into the whipped, cobalt sea. He holds her by the waist as they carefully inch their way down the path, and it is only her fear of falling that keeps Ariadne from giggling.

"It's like being at the end of the world," she says as she stands on the flat rock, which burns the soles of her feet, and looks towards the horizon. Before her is nothing but open sea, and all evidence of the town is blotted out by the cliffs behind her.

"That's why I come here," Daniel replies, resting his arm across her shoulders.

For a moment Ariadne imagines the two of them swimming naked in the folds of the cobalt sea, out towards the horizon, not caring about their destination, until all land behind them has disappeared. Until a person standing on the flat rock could no longer make out their shapes in the distance.

She rolls out her straw beach mat and stands on it as she removes her clothing under Daniel's unflinching gaze, and then lies down on her back, offering her young body to the sun, to the gods, to Daniel on the sacrificial rock. Daniel lets his black shorts drop around his ankles and lies down next to her, offering his body to the same deities. *(Though this tangential affair was not part of their original plan, the deities are only too willing to be distracted, and gladly accept the offerings.)* Ariadne turns her head slightly, her sunglasses hiding the intensity with which her eyes take in Daniel's nakedness, his cock, curled like a sleeping snake in the brownish-gold bush of his pubic hair and tanned the same caramel shade as the rest of his body.

The passengers of an approaching ferry spot the two beautiful bodies stretched out on that slab of rock, worshipping and being worshipped by the sun. A few point and call their friends over to take a look, while others, more pious, turn their heads away, fearing the punishment of blindness for their glimpse with mortal eyes into the bedroom of the gods.

Ariadne and Daniel are oblivious to their role as symbols of other-worldly love and sensuality, lulled into half-sleep as they are by the gentle lapping of waves on the rock, by the hypnotic gaze of the siesta sun whose intensity can only be borne by initiates.

The ferry's passengers aren't the only ones to spy Ariadne and Daniel, that most forbidden of couples, stretched out next to each other in a posture both innocent and incriminating, depending the beholder. Someone much closer than the ferry's passengers and familiar with the repertoire of players in Nysas' theater pops his head around the rock which hides the altar by the sea from the incidental passerby. His eyes fall first upon Ariadne, who he has studied from a distance in the village and from up close at the Scat Club. He then turns to Daniel, who has come to his house in the valley several times, his pockets bursting with pre-rolled joints.

This coincidental witness is neither secret agent nor gossipmonger. He is a theater director from Norway who has rented a house in the valley for the summer, far enough from the village so he can look up at it like a stage from his verandah. From that distance he can watch all the comings and goings, the antics and dramas, the intrigues and betrayals of the inhabitants and visitors as if they were stories acted out by characters. He isn't at all interested in the personalities, the struggles or the feelings of the individuals he is observing. What he is interested in is their movements, their postures, and their entanglements at a basic level—that of action.

The director, whose reputation at home has withered due to a prolonged creative drought, has come to Nysas looking for inspiration, for ready-made theater in the tradition of Duchamps' fountain. He believes that if a strong setting is provided, the story and its moral will present itself. All he has to do is sit back, watch and wait. Something is bound to happen.

Until a few moments ago, when he stumbled upon Ariadne on a rock by the sea with a married man, the director was not certain where she might fit into his play, though he was sure that in time her part would write itself out. He liked the way she moved through space: her bird's elbows, cocked and held slightly akimbo, gave the impression that she was about to take flight. He was also intrigued by her series of men: one after another they trailed her around Nysas, totally devoted and obedient, at her mercy during the short stay they could afford. All the men, he'd observed, had the same aura. They were brothers under the skin, though they all came from different lands and seemed capable of starting a war for her favours. She, on the other hand, showed no marked preference for one or another. They were merely her temporary servants, to be treated kindly but with a firm hand so that they never overstepped their station. Her aura was dark and dense, and no matter how exotic their charms, no matter what gifts they brought, not one of her suitors had succeeded in penetrating it.

Though once this was established, her story had nowhere to go. The pattern repeated itself night after night to the strains of jazz. Something needed to give, the storm clouds that shrouded her would have to burst or lift soon, or he would have to write her out of the script. What he needed was her motivation.

One night he tried to get through to her directly. He went to the Scat Club with a date, and when Ariadne brought their drinks and then turned to go, the director grabbed her by the wrist. She turned towards him, her eyes burning holes into his skin, and yanked her hand from his grasp. Unjarred by her antagonism, he asked: "Why do you think all your lovers, no matter where they're from, are exactly the same?" She sneered at him, then looked over at his date with equal disdain.

"Why is it," she asked haughtily, "that all your women, no matter where they're from, always pay for your drinks?" She then flew away from his table and ignored him for the rest of the night. Her hate for him excited him even more. What was more challenging for a creator than a hostile character, one he couldn't control?

And now she is going to deliver, he thinks as he watches Ariadne brush her fingers lightly over Daniel's face and neck while he sleeps, not daring to touch him. Maybe this will prove to be the big turning point in her story. Forbidden lovers, a jealous wife rumoured to dabble in the black arts. Conflict, confrontation, blood feuds. He decides to stay up on the path and watch, not to disturb the scene just yet with his directorial imperatives. His mind races over possible scenarios as he watches the supine bodies that are unaware their actions are already being planned, a tragic end mapped out by a stealer of lives.

After roughly three quarters of an hour at his post, the director decides that nothing climactic is going to happen right then (life is always so much slower than theater in its revelations and decisions), so he goes back to his house in the valley, making a mental note to watch Ariadne even more diligently in the next few days. He

wants to be there when the clouds rend, loosing torrents of rain and deafening thunder before moving off and leaving Ariadne drenched and without protection. From what or whom? That too will reveal itself soon enough, if only in his imagination. He has to get home immediately, take down some notes, some impressions and projections. The before and the after. His play is about to burst to life. And maybe Ariadne, the beautifully hostile, will in fact turn out to be his main character.

Of course, he has it all wrong. There is only one person in Ariadne's life with the power to change the weather—the high pressure, the doldrums, the depression. It cannot even be conceived by the director who that person is or who Ariadne, on the verge of flight with her bird elbows, might be. This is the downfall of the supposed objective observer. He never gets close enough to see the real person, to touch her wounds and smell her festering flesh.

But the director is happy with himself, so let him be. Who needs another meddlesome storyteller messing up the plot? Truth is stranger than fiction, so let's stick to the truth.

After the director leaves, as if on cue, Ariadne and Daniel roll from their beach mats into the cool water, swim out far enough so that someone standing on the burning flat rock might mistake their tiny, bobbing heads for sea birds dipping their feet into the waves. They wrap their arms around each other and kiss deeply while their legs thrash manically below the surface, keeping them afloat. They then swim back to the rock, full of saltwater and the taste of each other, and lie back down on the beach mats as if they haven't moved, as if nothing has happened. The sun quickly burns away the drops of water that have settled on their bodies, and if the director had thought to come back for a second look, he would curse them for being so passive, so undramatic, so slow—which proves that if you blink for a moment, you miss the whole show.

Ariadne and Daniel walk back to town, maintaining the same plump-child distance from each other, then part ways without talking about what has taken place.

There is no need for dialogue. They know that they will kiss again somewhere, somehow, based on a script only known by the two of them. That's how things normally go, after all, and as for the rest of the world, what they don't know, they just don't know. And that is good, too.

29.

Ariadne falls ill during a period when sickness is not allowed. High season. Peak season. Zenith. Karina immediately blames the evil eye, but Ariadne knows better. It is July and five thousand tourists have descended upon an island that usually accommodates a population of five hundred. The newcomers elbow for room in the cafés, the bars, and even on the beach. A number of entrepreneurial islanders rent out space on their roofs and their patios to sleeping-bag toters for 200 drachmas a night, the going rate for a real, four-walled, iron-bedded room. They also charge 25 drachmas for the use of their toilet, 50 drachmas for a cold shower, 100 for hot water, though some of their guests consider these extras superfluous. The fetid smell that hangs over Nysas, rampant with budget tourists, is enough to make anyone sick.

Nationalistic tensions are reaching their own peak, between the French and English, the German and Dutch, the Americans and everybody else. One thing that all of Europe agrees upon is that they don't like the Americans. The Europeans express their distaste for the New World adventurers with hand gestures and tongue clickings appropriate to their nationality. More fights than usual break out, keeping the half-witted police force running around and swinging their batons over their heads like propellers. There is also an increase in real propeller action over Nysas, flocks of helicopters flying in to airlift the battle-scarred.

The rumour mill spins with gale force winds during high season. After the latest airlift, word spreads that someone's penis broke. Kyr Georgis is overheard describing

the incident in a tone that combines wonder and horror to a group of other men, equally awed and horrified, at the *Kafenion*.

"It was broken in the middle, bent like an elbow." He uses his middle finger to demonstrate the angle. His grim-faced audience collectively gulps, wondering how they might protect their shriveling old dicks from a similar fate. No one questions whether such a tragedy is possible, or how it might have happened. They just accept it as truth. Their island has changed so much in the last decade that the most bizarre incidents now seem perfectly normal.

A 100 year old farmer falls off his donkey in the valley and dies. He had ridden through that same valley for 90 years and now this. The church bells toll for him, and all of the village's black-clad grannies gather like vultures in front of *Agia Irini* to see the body carried in. Someone put the evil eye on the animal, one of the grannies whispers, afraid that the perpetrator might be another one of the grannies—probably the one with the mismatched glass eye who stands apart and watches the others suspiciously. The grannies press their lips together and nod slowly in agreement, staring down the dissident and crossing themselves as they wait for the priest and his altar boys to burst out of the darkened church, dressed in blinding gold, carrying icons that resemble the decapitated heads of rebels on long sticks, and spreading a cloud of frankincense as they march solemnly down the hill towards the town. A few of the vultures take their place behind the procession, following the priest to the house of the deceased, mumbling prayers under their breath and secretly thanking Death for passing them by, while tourists click snapshots without asking permission.

A couple from France makes love on the beach under the approving gaze of the stars and a full, smiling moon. The next morning they are found drowned, still wrapped around each other. He has to be cut loose of her because the water pressure has joined their bodies for all eternity. Old Man Socrates, who is currently sitting in the barbershop's only chair, tells this story to the other men, including Petros, who are

waiting their turn. They click their tongues in unison. "Never trust a hole," Socrates declares. "Get in and get out as soon as you can." After a few minutes contemplation, he adds, "And don't let her get her arms around you. Do it by the back, friends." The men nod gravely as Socrates lifts his hips out of the barber's chair in a thrusting motion and the barber nicks his throat. At that very moment Socrates' wife, Kyria Roula, pops her head into the barber shop and orders him to come straight home after he is done. "Yes, my joy," he responds obediently, then turns the conversation to politics, a safer topic.

Ariadne hears of these incidents constantly but can never find any proof that they actually happened. There is no local newspaper, only word of mouth, and the clippings from the Athenian newspapers that Karina's mother insists on sending her fallen daughter are grossly exaggerated and completely imprecise at the same time. "The Island of Sodom and Gomorra," the headlines declare. The articles that follow report general disapproval of the nakedness and sex on Nysas and nothing more. "Only anomalies go there," Karina's mother screams in her letters, then submits a self-righteous rant to the editor of an Athens paper, writing about her own daughter as if she has been kidnapped by a cult. Because of letters like Karina's mother's, even more anomalies flock to Nysas. It is this pandemonium of anomalies that has sickened Ariadne.

Tonight the Scat Club is full of people trying too hard to have a good time. Ariadne drags her tired body through the two smoke-filled rooms and back to the bar a thousand times, trying to smile as she goes through the usual routine: "When was the last time you had an Orgasm?" "How about a French Kiss to start you off?" The same cheesy shit that works, every night, week after week, month after month, on most of the people, all of the time.

A group of American secretaries titters in embarrassment when Ariadne makes her offer; the girls then order a round of Orgasms hoping that the elixir will improve their luck, loosen their inhibitions, and smooth out the way towards that elusive bodily event.

A couple of drunken Scots at another table ask for Ariadne's hand in marriage . The members of an Australian rugby team stick their tongues out at her, wiggle them lewdly and then order milkshakes instead. And a table of Brits are too busy making smart remarks to each other about Ariadne's come-on to actually respond to her. They speak about her as if she wasn't even in the room. "You think I should give her a go?"

This night isn't actually any different from any other of the interminable nights at the Scat, but apart from the sudden invasion of anomalies, Ariadne has the Nysas flu, which makes every gesture, every grab, and every dirty look thrown at her by Thanasis even more misery-inducing than usual.

When the night finally comes to an end and the last drunk is expelled from the Scat, Thanasis slaps 2000 drachmas on the bar and walks out without saying goodnight. As Ariadne washes the night's surviving glasses, sweeps up the broken ones, Alikí walks in and sits at the bar without acknowledging the younger woman's presence; instead, she picks pellicles of dripped wax off the bar's surface with her fingernails, then flicks the flakes onto the swept floor. When all the wax is gone, she trains her empty eyes on Ariadne.

"You were rude to the customers tonight. We will not have that."

Ariadne continues washing glasses in the cold, dirty water, and doesn't look up at the other woman. Thanasis had sicced his kicked dog on her more than once by now, and Ariadne just waits patiently for Alikí's attack.

"If you don't like working here, Ariadne, there are a dozen others waiting in line for your job. You are replaceable, you know." Alikí's tone is clinical, and her face betrays no emotion one way or another. She wants Ariadne to feel her indifference.

Under normal circumstances, Ariadne would immediately realize that Alikí's claim was not true. If it were true, she'd counter, why was she the only one who hadn't walked out on them, why were there so many nights when she was the only one working besides Thanasis, and why was she the only one there right now, cleaning, mopping,

taking out the garbage and painting the fucking floor? Where were these dozen perfect employees vying for her position as slave? Where?

But apart from her constant, low-grade desperation, the Nysas flu has made Ariadne additionally vulnerable. Her mind races in circles, collecting the events of the night until she is dizzy, looking for something to apologize for so she can just get it over with. Who had she been rude to? The Italian who grabbed her thigh every time she passed his table until she screamed *basta!*—Enough!—over the strains of Dave Brubeck, and still he wouldn't stop? Or was it the aforementioned Brits? "You think I should give her a go?" She promptly informed them that the only go they could happily give her would be the one that took them out the door. Normally such banal crudeness would slide right off her, but the flu has stripped away the protective layer that keeps the constant indignity away from her soul.

Ariadne bursts into tears and apologizes to the smug Alik. She tells her that she's been sick all day, so sick that she could hardly get out of bed in the morning to fill the Scat's bottles and empty and refill the ice-cube trays. Alik's eyes dash back and forth for a few seconds as she tries to come up with a response to Ariadne's outburst. Alik clears her throat.

"If you are sick, you should let us know ahead of time so we can make other arrangements." Her face remains apathetic as she speaks. She cannot even bring herself to feign concern for the younger woman because if Alik brings down the icy gates of her detachment and shows concern for Ariadne, who is at her mercy, her own heart might crack open, unleashing the flood of sorrow that she holds behind her neutral stare, a grief that has atrophied inside her leaving a rock where her heart used to be. Besides, Ariadne ceased being human to Alik the day she started working at the Scat Club. The younger woman is simply a tool that makes her life easier or more difficult, and a servant she can wield power over. Because even when Alik is upstairs, safely tucked

behind the bar of the No Problem, it is Thanasis who has the power, who calls the shots, who keeps her in her place.

Perhaps Alikí woke up one morning long ago during high season with the Nysas flu and went to Thanasis looking for sympathy. Maybe she stood behind the bar of the No Problem with swollen feet and glands, a fever burning up her synapses, and a smile plastered across her face because that is what she had been ordered to do—to forget her pain. And having forgotten her own, she can no longer understand the pain of others.

The next day Ariadne still feels sick, and she tells Alikí ahead of time, but it doesn't make a damn difference. It is high season on Nysas, she is informed, and all sickness will have to wait until the fall. Right now there was a line-up for Orgasms at the Scat Club, and only Ariadne to provide them.

For JSL

30.

"There's a porn film being shot down at the beach." Karina, who no one has seen all day, flops herself on her bed and rests her hands behind her head. "Right by the rocks where the old men fish every morning. You should have seen the look on their faces."

"Hey, Kapetan' Manolis told me there was something weird going on, but I didn't believe him. Said the lights scared off his fish," says Petros, who is learning how to hunt squid from the old fisherman whose hands are permanently stained purple.

"Who's making it, Greeks or foreigners?" By this point Ariadne believes everything and nothing she hears on Nysas. She has become acclimatized. Or more precisely, she has become indifferent to those fine lines that separate the real from the imagined. She sits at the edge of Karina's bed and smooths down her friend's mussed

hair. When Karina lifts her head to tell the story, a fine layer of sand dusts the pillowcase.

"The really tall, bald French guy. You've seen him. He wears those little round sunglasses with the red lenses all day and night and goes up to women he fancies, asks if they want to be stars."

Ariadne has heard so many pathetic come-on lines since she's come to Nysas ("*Are you a model?*" "*Haven't I seen you on TV?*") that one more or less did not make an impression on her. But she does remember the bald Frenchman and his red-lensed squint, sizing her up from a distance on the beach. He walked up to her as she was about to enter the water and looked over her body as if it were a lace tablecloth hanging outside a shop window. He reached out to feel the texture of the needlework, running his forefinger along her arm to get her attention.

"Are you an actress, *mademoiselle*," he asked suavely, "or just a natural?"

Ariadne stared at him in disbelief, one eyebrow raised, letting him know without a word that she had heard it all before. She turned her back to the Frenchman (and what a back *magnifique*, tanned and straight, sloping down into a perfect ass, the Frenchman noted), then dove into a wave and swam underwater until she could no longer hold her breath. She cracked the surface of the water and rubbed the salt out of her eyes, arched backwards and dunked her head to smooth her tangled, snaky locks. When she turned towards the shore, the Frenchman was still standing there, staring at her through a camera with a very long lens.

For the first time in all her months on Nysas, Ariadne felt exposed, in need of cover. This was far worse than being spied on by Kyr Georgis, who the villagers said did it with his goats at night. At least Kyr Georgis had the excuse of ignorance coupled with an underdeveloped brain, which left him at the mercy of his basest instincts. The

bald Frenchman with the long lens knew very well that he was invading, stealing, and did it anyway, in the full light of day, with a dirty smile on his face.

Ariadne rose out of the water to her waist, as if a retinue of nymphs were holding her up by her feet. The Frenchman, still peering through his camera waved at her, then raised a thumb to indicate his readiness to shoot and his pleasure with her pose. Ariadne raised her middle finger in front of her face in reply, jabbed it towards the sky. She then disappeared underwater, swimming amongst the children of the sea, letting them guide her. She emerged refreshed at the far end of the beach, where the waters were stained black with squid ink though she remained surprisingly unsullied. She didn't see the director applauding, didn't hear him yelling, "*Bravo, ma petite*," or ordering his hunch-backed, horny toady to go into the water and bring her back, grab her by the hair like a caveman if she refused to cooperate. The toady stripped down to a pair of white stained underwear and walked into the water warily. He had barely submerged himself up to his waist when a *medusa*, a jelly fish, stung his balls. He ran towards the shore screaming. The nymphs were on Ariadne's side.

"What were you doing at the beach this morning anyway?" Ariadne asks nonchalantly, deciding not to share her encounter with the bald pornographer with Karina and Petros because she is in no mood for stupid jokes. She has not taken a lover since Rut left, and the dilemma about whether or not to sleep with Daniel is not proving distracting enough to make her forget her troubles. She is almost glad she's been sick for a few days, unable to make any decisions one way or another. It has been over two weeks and Yannis hasn't called her back. She doesn't have the nerve to call him, afraid of further consequences, and her friends have advised against it. "Don't be a fool," Karina scolded, "you're not looking for love, you're looking for more abuse." But what Ariadne is looking for is a plug for the bottomless pit that has opened up inside her, through which she is still falling.

"I met a Yugoslavian guy at the Tartarus last night," Karina begins. "He was badly dressed, like all his clothes belonged to someone else, and he wore a pair of those horrible Speedo beach slippers. He was so proud of them because they were new that I didn't even have the heart to make fun of them."

Within the oligarchy of the cheese room, the blue and white plastic flip-flops merited equivalent disdain as Petros' underwear—those tattered bikini briefs with the corny and vulgar decals stretched over the crotch that announced "Rugby Players Have Leather Balls," or even more offensively, "Rub here and your wish will come true."

"Really? You fucked someone in Speedo beach slippers. Ugh." Ariadne grimaces, slides her index finger across her throat, then gives the thumbs down signal. Under the laws of the cheese room, Karina has committed a grievous crime and will have to die.

"Shut up, *malaka*. He took them off before he got into bed. His name was Miro and he waited for me outside the restaurant until closing, then walked me back to the village. We sat down on the church steps and he pulled out a bottle of retsina..."

"And told her she was the most beautiful girl on Nysas."

"I wish you'd just get laid, Petros." That shut him up good and tight. Petros' luck with women was worsening as the season wore on. It was either the fault of the underwear itself or the rumour that there was nothing in it.

"Go on, go on."

"Well I hate retsina, it gives me a headache, but I'd had a bad night at work and I guess I wanted to forget. So I took a few swigs and when he asked me to go home with him, I just followed."

Home for Miro was a small army tent at the campsite on the beach, the least favoured of all places for the Perms. No fuck was worth the mosquitoes or the sand in the crack of your ass. Only the most inexperienced tourists—mostly the ones who lived in large cities—still laboured under the illusion that a sandpaper fuck was romantic.

Karina was halfway down the road to the beach when she realized Miro wasn't taking her to a *pension*. She turned around, looked at the lights of the village and decided she was too tired to walk back up the hill. And Miro held her hand so firmly and tenderly that she didn't want to disappoint him—or herself for that matter. "That Yugoslav was damn cute," she tells her friends.

It is only in these brief encounters in tents, in single beds in small rooms, and in the cheese room where her roommate snores through her muffled passion that Karina has ever caught a glimpse of what it feels like to be loved. No one has had the heart to tell her that this was not what was transpiring in the raised asses, the sweat, and the grunts. Karina just takes what she can get. At the age of twenty five, she has not yet managed to sustain any sort of long term relationship, the kind where promises are made, secret codes developed, where your face begins to move in the same expressive ways as your beloved's. It is her unfulfilled dream, a goal yet to be realized for which she collects newspaper clippings, topics of conversation, pet names and secret revelations like treasures for a dowry. One day she hopes someone with the right key will come along and unlock the trunk, and everything that she has saved will burst forth, showering the worthy *objet d'amour* with all the love Karina has so carefully hoarded.

Her friends theorize that it is this illusion about the perfect man that keeps Karina out of long term relationships. More likely it is lack of skill. Her techniques have all been acquired during one-night-stands. She never asks the men their last names. She never shares any of her plans or hopes. And she always leaves before the sun rises and exposes all the strangeness and awkwardness to the light. It is important to leave before the disappointment sets in, before the lubricating drunkenness wears off completely. It isn't her fault; it is the only behaviour she knows. The only way she imagines that women and men relate. The rest is just fantasy to be enjoyed on her own. These, of course, are things that Karina reveals to no one. She speaks of her one-nighters with the

enthusiasm of a fanatic who has just discovered the perfect cult and is looking for converts. Everyone has their own brand of insanity.

"You should have known that commies never have money for rooms," Petros taunts, challenging Karina's naive surprise when Prince Miro held the flap of his one man tent open for her to crawl into like a kennel.

"Well I didn't stay long," Karina continues. "As soon as it was over, I crawled back out of the tent intending to take a swim, to wash off his sweat and the sand that clung to it. He was snoring like a mule by that point, and you can't imagine what that's like in the confines of a tent. I thought my head would explode."

"It was probably the retsina," Ariadne offers.

"Well that, too."

As Wildendorf Karina emerged naked from the tent, she was blinded by lights set up on the beach. When her eyes adjusted to the glare she saw the tall, bald Frenchman. He was barking orders through a megaphone to a couple rutting on the sand under lights hot as the midday sun. "*Plus vite, plus vite*," he commanded, and the couple complied. It was not often that Karina got the chance to watch two people fucking without a sense of guilt. Not at all like the few occasions earlier in the season when she'd spied on Petros through half-opened eyes while she pretended to be sleeping. She recognized the couple from the Tartarus. They were not particularly attractive, but were obviously confident enough to share their most intimate moment with the world. That, Karina thought wistfully, must be true love.

As she stood there watching, feeling a little aroused despite the objectivity that she was trying to maintain as a not entirely innocent bystander, she considered crawling back into the hot, cramped tent with the snoring Miro. In the next second she banished the thought from her mind. That type of move would go against all her well defined rules, so she crossed her arms against her own desire. The horny toady, whose jellyfish encounter was already old news thanks to the endless appetite on Nysas for such

personal injuries, approached Karina. In his best Maurice Chevalier English he asked her if she wanted to be an extra.

"You must stand in *le cercle* and shout for *le couple qui baise* when I say. *Tres simple*. You want?" Before she had time to respond, he took her hand and led her towards a circle of naked people. The toady then showed her and the other extras their cue. Karina smiled nervously at the man standing next to her, a burly brute whose body was covered in a coat of black kinky hair, and whose engorged penis made him look like the painted satyrs who danced around ancient amphoras. She looked at the other people surrounding the still rutting couple and realized that they were all chosen for their mythological attributes. Across her stood fleet-footed Hermes, blonde, curly-haired, with a tattoo of a wing on his ankle. Next to him was Poseidon, his beard dripping seaweed. By him stood Artemis, small-breasted and muscular, her eyes darting back and forth in search of prey.

When the signal was given—two hands raised in the air by the toady as if he were a conductor sustaining a high note (the toady was proud of his responsibility and took his job seriously)—the gods, some drunk, some sleepy, collected around the couple and let out a triumphant cheer that echoed through the valley, up into the village. Karina's voice rose high above the rest.

"You mean you were actually in it? You? Naked?" Ariadne guffaws and shakes her head in disbelief.

"You have a problem with that, Ariadne, my girl?"

"She's just jealous," Petros answers for her. "All that excitement and she missed out."

"You know, they asked me, too. Yesterday afternoon, at the beach."

"Oh sure, Ariadne. It's always you they ask." Karina's voice drips with sarcasm. She is not going to let anyone share her moment in the spotlight.

"Well they did," Ariadne begins, then backs off. Though she did not appreciate the bald Frenchman's attention, she feels slightly annoyed at having been replaced. She would have never done it, of course, but she hates letting go of anything that belonged to her, no matter how little she wanted it. She comforts herself with the thought that sex is the most private of activities to her, which she has no desire to share with more than one other person at a time. The threesomes that Yannis sometimes suggested disturbed her deeply. She always refused. Petros, one room away behind closed doors, had been enough to inhibit her. Even mirrors mortify her. She doesn't like to be watched and she doesn't want to watch herself. She is afraid of what she might discover. No, she would have never agreed to be in the porn film, but now that Karina has done it, she feels a little left out.

"When do we get to see it?" she asks enthusiastically, trying to rise above her sulkiness.

"I don't know, but I gave Jellyfish Boy my address. 'Send it to my mother's house,' I told him, 'or she won't believe that I was actually here.'"

Everyone laughs along with Karina, then Ariadne asks, "What about the Yugoslav?"

"Who cares about the Yugoslav," Karina replies airily, "now that I'm a porn star I can have anyone I want."

"So can we tell people?"

"Can I have your autograph?" Petros unzips his fly, revealing his "Linda Lovelace Eats Here" briefs with their sparkly purple lips.

"Fuck off, Petros. I wouldn't touch your wee-wee with a ten foot pole. And you know how it is. Everyone already knows." Karina's smile reveals that she is very satisfied with this state of affairs. "As I walked back up to the village, the Father Theodoros was in front of me, running up the hill, tripping over his robes, crossing

himself and panting. He'll tell the old ladies, they'll tell everyone else and Kyr Georgis will bring me flowers."

"What the hell was the priest doing down there? That's disgusting."

"What do you think, Ariadne?" Karina rolls her eyes.

"I'll bet he was wanking off under there." Petros smirks.

"Praying for our sins, while committing his own," Karina concludes.

Miro the Yugoslav wakes up from his deep and drunken sleep, after the pornographers have packed up and left, after Karina has disappeared, and wonders whether he brought anyone back to his tent last night at all or whether he just dreamt it. He puts on his brand new Speedo beach slippers, lights an American cigarette and walks towards the shoreline. He splashes his face with the warm salt water to clear his head. There are already hundreds of naked bodies baking in the sun, stretched out on their straw beach mats and colourful towels like corpses laid out in a field after an attack. Miro goes back to the campsite, strikes his tent and decides it is time to go home. Something about all those motionless bodies has given him an uneasy feeling that he can't explain. He boards the ferry later that afternoon without looking back and completely forgets that anything happened the night before. Just like Karina.

31.

The irony in Karina's inability to find lasting love for herself is that although she lacks the skill to set herself up, she is the most enthusiastic supporter when one of her friends verges upon that amorous precipice. More often than not she votes in favour of the long lasting, idealizing whatever match is in danger of not living into the happily ever after. She always takes the side of the underdog, against all odds, be it insurmountable distance (he lives in Greece, she lives in Timbuktu), equipment size and mechanical

failure, or intense disinterest on the part of the beloved. It is chiefly Karina's doing that weeks after heartbroken Rut has left Nysas to pillage the hearts and loins of others to make up for his loss, Ariadne finds a tiny soft spot for him somewhere inside herself which makes her send him a postcard asking forgiveness.

Karina's method is two-tiered. First she elevates the mistreated lover to sainthood: "Of all the guys you've picked up on this island, that Rut was the sweetest, handsomest, most gentlemanly, most dedicated, smartest, most talented, sexiest, the best swimmer, funniest, slyest, most generous, wore the best shoes."

She then plays all of the spurned lover's fine qualities against the unworthiness of the disinterested beloved: "I just can't understand what that angelic being could ever see in a crow like you."

Had Ariadne missed something? Was she so dead and desolate in her soul that she was unable to appreciate Rut's angelic qualities? Was she so ill and corrupt that the goodness, the healing that his true love brought had completely missed her, passed right through her heart without leaving a mark? Maybe. Or maybe she just wasn't interested. Maybe her heart didn't pound when he walked into the Scat Club because it knew what it wanted and Rut wasn't it. Maybe Rut's intense and immediate devotion put Ariadne off. What kind of life could he possibly have if he was so desperate to hand it over to her the minute she waved her little finger? How precious could a heart offered that easily be? Ariadne is used to a battle and a victory beyond all hope. Or conversely, agonizing defeat that wipes every living thing off the face of the earth. It is the impossibly unattainable that makes her heart beat, pushes her into pure and all-consuming action. If there isn't a fight, what can the spoils be worth? In this area, she is entirely normal.

But there is a doubt that nags at Ariadne in the moments when she wakes up alone after Daniel has crept home like a thief in the early morning hours to Maria, who always pretends she is sleeping, plugging her nose against the scent of Ariadne on her

beautiful husband's skin, cursing the other woman silently. In those first moments of her day, when Ariadne lies motionless and quiet, debating whether it is worth getting up at all, entering the day (a debate often lost by the day, but practicalities dragging her out of bed by the hair), she sometimes wonders if her heart has it all wrong. Whether the gouge left in its center by Yannis has skewed its reactions, like those of a beaten dog who forever cowers when a hand reaches out to stroke it.

All the things Karina has said about Rut are true, and perhaps it is just Ariadne's beaten dog who no longer understands the difference between a kind and a wicked master. She has learned to live with the beatings and cherishes her bruises, those multicoloured welts to her psyche that prove she has loved and survived. She has collected mementos of her pain—pictures, scraps of dialogue played over and over in her head like an infectious song, peculiar souvenirs like Yannis' broken shoelace, picked up from his bedroom floor and stuffed into a pocket before he noticed. She displays these souvenirs like exhibits at a private museum for the curious and perverse, those people who enjoy watching car crashes, staring into the blood spattered faces of the victims. It is that sudden flash of recognition, the sight of her own blood-spattered face with its unmoving opened eyes staring at nothing, that jolts her into action. She pens those few lines of apology to Rut on a black and white postcard that was waiting for her to walk by it.

There are two figures standing in the sea, ankle-deep in grey, stormy water. One of the figures is a dark-haired woman, her head bowed. She is draped in sheer black fabric that falls in soft gathers around her body. The second figure is a man draped in white, one hand resting on the woman's shoulder as if in absolution, the other arm slung over a crutch. He balances on one foot, holding his other bandaged foot, over the water. But it is their wings that Ariadne notices first: his white, hers black, sprouting out of their backs and dripping sea water. The angel is forgiving the crow for her crippling blow.

As Ariadne pays for the card she sees Daniel approaching and her heart begins to race. Panic or desire? Old habits are hard to break, and some aren't breakable at all. She slips the postcard into her pocket and ducks into an alleyway, hoping Daniel hasn't seen her, but he follows her, grinning devilishly.

"There's no place to hide from me, my Ariadne. I will find you every time like a dog finds his bone." Daniel pins her shoulders to the wall and unbuttons her shorts, covering her mouth with his before she can object. Ariadne, her eyes wide open with panic, sees people passing by the alleyway. A few stop to stare, and soon there is a crowd plugging up her only escape. She shuts her eyes to block them out, though she can still hear their whispering, their whistles and their clicking tongues. The sound that disturbs her most in her darkness, however, is the snap of a camera shutter and then the whirring of winding film. She does not dare open her eyes.

She makes several attempts to push Daniel away, but she soon realizes that she isn't pushing him at all, but pulling him closer. Her hand is already in his pants, gripping his straight, smooth cock. She pumps it evenly, moving her own body to the rhythm. She squeezes it, then lets go, sliding her fingers along the shaft, and pushing down hard to the base. Daniel moans slightly and his body shakes, but he doesn't come. He never comes.

They had real sex for the first time after a tense afternoon on the flat rock. By now anyone who was looking for them knew where to find them, including Maria who seemed to be biding her time, waiting for Daniel to tire of Ariadne like he did of all the others. After several afternoons of lying together like chaste lovers under the watchful eye of the sun, exchanging deep sea kisses, then crawling back onto the flat rock like crabs, Daniel rolled onto Ariadne's beach mat, placed a hand on her breast and whispered, "I can't stand this anymore." He then began to stroke her body.

"Not here," Ariadne whispered back, looking around nervously for prying eyes.
"Let's go to my room."

As they walked back to town briskly—through the village gates, past the SnakeSkin—the theater director, who was trying to make a long distance phone call from the sandwich shop across Ketí's store, spotted them. He ran out after them, the long distance meter adding drachmas by the hundreds as his mother screamed hello all the way from Norway. He would have followed Ariadne and Daniel all the way to her room, having waited so patiently all this time for something to happen. But the sandwich man called him back to the phone, and when the director finally spoke to his mother, he was not as nice to her as he might have been when she told him his father was gravely ill and he'd have to come home immediately, empty handed.

When the wooden door to Ariadne's room shut behind them and the curtain was drawn against Kyr Georgis, they began removing their clothes once more. Ariadne turned her back to Daniel, suddenly shy of him. The nakedness in the confines of her room felt different than the kind they'd shared on the rock. This nakedness was dangerous and forbidden, rife with consequences. On the rock Ariadne had fooled herself into believing that everything was out in the open and that no one was being deceived, least of all her. But now, in her room, Daniel pressing his nakedness onto hers from behind, his lips freely traversing the back of her neck down to her right shoulder, his hands cupping both her breasts, she became aware again of the sensation of falling, and there was nothing to hang onto. Not Daniel, not herself, not the rock. Before he entered her, he looked into her eyes and confessed, "I don't come anymore. All those years on junk." He said it, but somehow she didn't hear it. She was too busy trying to angle her body so that her neck wouldn't break when she landed.

And he didn't come, just as he'd promised, though his body shook and his pupils expanded. From that afternoon on he made love to her daily before crawling back to Maria, who was starting to consider dark and drastic measures. He never came. But

neither did Ariadne. It was the last thing of herself that she still owned, that she could give Yannis if he ever came back.

When Daniel finally moves away from her, offering one last kiss, Ariadne opens her eyes and looks towards the mouth of the alleyway. She breathes a sigh of relief when she sees no one there except a little boy who has just run in to retrieve his ball. The boy's bewildered look embarrasses her. Daniel squeezes her arm. "I'll see you later. I'm looking after the shop this afternoon. Maria is going away for a few weeks to take care of some family business in Athens, so I'll be all yours." His words float in the air between them as Ariadne's insides seize up.

Before he leaves, he bends over and picks up the postcard that has fallen out of Ariadne's pocket as he pulled at her clothes. The postcard has a large crease down the center and Daniel's sandal print marks the back.

"This yours?" Daniel studies the picture of the angel and the crow in amusement. "Very biblical."

Ariadne almost denies it is hers, then grabs it from his hand a little too quickly. She rubs at the dirt and tries to smooth out the crease with her fingers.

"Must have fallen out of my pocket. You like it?" She flashes the image at him again and giggles self-consciously.

"A little sentimental for my tastes. Who is it for? My good friend Rut?" Ariadne's face turns scarlet. How could he know?

"It's for my mother," she lies, stuffing the card back into her pocket. ("The devil always knows your next move before you do," her grandmother once warned. But she thought Yannis was the devil and Rut the angel. Black, white, it had been very clear. Who then was the beautiful Daniel? Another devil? Could there be more than one?)

In a café later that afternoon, amidst the leering stares of old Greek men and the dirty comments that they think she doesn't understand, Ariadne writes to Rut. It is a

simple note, recalling their time together, apologizing for her cruelty, and telling him that she is glad they met. Nothing extravagant, nothing special. She mails the card the same day with the urgency and caution of a secret missive sent to the Resistance, that army of angels who might help her escape this inferno, which gets hotter by the day, harder to bear.

Something of the urgency, of the fear and desperation that she feels must have been sown into the simple words on the back of the black and white postcard. Within a week Ariadne receives the first phone call, then the presents start arriving, then the love letters full of promises of return. She doesn't tell Daniel any of it. Secrecy remains a key factor to her deliverance.

But Rut proves to be a secret that is easily kept. Once the impediment of Maria is removed, Ariadne and Daniel's interest in each other rapidly wanes. It would be difficult to say who pulled back first—it is as simultaneous as it is predictable.

After a week of whole nights spent in Ariadne's single bed (Daniel has invited her into his double bed, but Ariadne refuses to go), she makes a date with someone else, who waits for her until closing and then accompanies her home. Her correspondence with Rut has affected neither her whims nor her ways. As if pre-arranged, Daniel fails to show up at the Scat Club at his usual time—3:45 a.m., after Thanasis is long gone and just as Ariadne is locking up. He doesn't even pop his god-like head through the window earlier in the evening to tell her he won't be back.

Daniel's absence is barely registered by Ariadne, distracted as she is by the young German who is going to be a journalist and asks her all the right questions without burdening her with his own observations, experiences and confessions. For his part, Daniel finds plenty of other things to keep him busy while his house cat is away. Who, after all, needs a mistress when whole, empty days and nights, free of dinner schedules and check-ins and excuses, lie before him? Mistresses are carefully guarded and

convenient secrets. With Maria gone, the beauty of having this type of secret is lost; it runs the risk of turning into a mundane truth he will be stuck with like a wife.

By failing to appear, Daniel is creating secrets to keep from Ariadne, just as she keeps Rut from him—the cheaters cheat each other effortlessly. However, neither Ariadne's nor Daniel's secrets are relevant because deep down neither of them cares: they are not in love, they are merely in cahoots. They discover that they are less attracted to each other than they are to their impediment: Maria, who cares immensely about their secrets, great and small. She is the principal member of the relationship, the glue that has held it together, the strange attractor that constellated their distraction amidst the chaos of Nysas.

Ariadne and Daniel stretch out on the flat rock a few more times, sleep in the single bed without having sex. By the third week of Maria's absence, they look past each other in the square as if they have never met, as if a spell cast to induce amnesia has finally binded. Maria could not have been more successful in ending the affair, in separating Ariadne and Daniel, had she caused a scene in the same square, clawing her breasts and her face while evoking an ancient law that condemned adulteresses to be flogged then pushed off a cliff.

Perhaps Maria knows her husband better than he or anyone thinks, and the family business she is taking care of on her extended trip to Athens is the business of quashing his latest affair without lifting a finger or raising her hackles. Perhaps she has left a trusted lookout, a mole, on Nysas, who will send her a sign in Athens or on the next island or wherever she really is when her withdrawal from the triangle has yielded the necessary results, when it is time for her to reappear, unannounced. Perhaps this is precisely how the half-Armenian Maria planned it, in secret, on insomniac nights seething in her half-empty bed, whispered to by the most vengeful goddesses, while her husband lay in her enemy's arms.

Perhaps it is not.

Section IV

32.

On their second date, which took place precisely 24 hours after their first date had ended, Ariadne asked Yannis to move in with her with no hint of anxiety or hesitation. Yannis accepted her proposal immediately with an equivalent lack of anxiety or hesitation, moving in a week later and bringing a sound system, a small black and white TV, his guitar and a few items of his clothing with him. The reciprocity stopped there.

Ariadne continued to pay the entire rent for the little apartment, taking on a variety of part-time, short-lived jobs and never thinking to ask Yannis to contribute to the household budget. He was, after all, an artist and could not be expected to waste his god-given talents on menial labour for the sake of a few drachmas rent. The same went for food. Though Yannis occasionally sacked his parent's cupboards, arriving at Ariadne's door with bags full of cookies, tins of meat, and bread, it was Ariadne's duty to make sure that there was always enough for them to eat and drink. And Hera help her if she didn't.

She woke up one morning a week after he'd moved in and found her true love staring down angrily into her half-opened eyes. "Where's the coffee," he demanded in an accusatory tone.

"I don't know," she mumbled. "In the kitchen, I guess."

"There's no coffee in the kitchen," he bellowed, pounding the mattress. "Why isn't there any coffee?"

"How should I know? I don't even drink the stuff," Ariadne grumbled back, half-asleep. She didn't like alarm clocks, and she liked being yelled awake even less.

"If you loved me, you'd get up in the morning before me to make sure there was coffee in the kitchen, and if there wasn't any, you'd go out and buy some." He was livid. The colour rose and drained from his face like mercury in a temperature gauge as he paced at the foot of the mattress, naked.

"Who the hell do you think I am, your mother?" Ariadne was now sitting up. "You want your mama, boy, you'd better go home to her."

"If that's the way you want it." He pulled on a pair of socks that were lying balled up and dusty next to the bed and then his boots. He began throwing odd objects of his—a lighter, a book of poetry, a leather wrist strap that was sitting on the bookshelf—into his empty guitar case. "Why should I stay here with you," the tirade continued, "who doesn't even love me enough to keep me caffeinated." He threw a pair of red briefs and his black jeans into the case instead of putting them on. He tossed things in that weren't even his.

"So you're really going home to mama over a cup of coffee?" Ariadne asked, trying to stifle a laugh. "Looking like that?" He was quite a sight, his knobby white knees crashing into each other as he stumbled through the apartment in his ankle-high black boots, his wine-coloured balls punching out between his thighs like a fist.

When he continued packing his things without responding, Ariadne swallowed the laugh whole. She pictured herself alone in her apartment, bereft of the love that had lifted her out of her despair and above the crowd—those Pitsters she had so mercilessly abandoned in favour of his company and who no longer concerned themselves with her. She'd have to start all over, but this time from deeper inside the bottomless pit of anonymity where she had been dumped and left for dead upon moving to Athens. The taste of wet dirt still clung to her gums. She dug her nails into the pit's slimy walls and clawed her way up towards the pin-prick of light.

Yannis pulled on his leather jacket, picked up his guitar case and, still naked underneath, headed for the door. "It's been fun. I'll send someone for the stereo and the TV later today."

Trapped in the moment, Ariadne stared at his perfectly indifferent face, into his cold and listless eyes, and gasped, "You can't be serious. It's just coffee." It never occurred to her in her dismay that he wasn't going to get very far without clothes on.

"It's a symptom of a greater ill," he pronounced. "Today it's coffee that you won't give me, tomorrow it's bound to be something else." Yannis leaned up against the door, his legs crossed at the knees, his guitar case in front of him.

Head bowed in defeat, Ariadne put on her boots, pulled on a loose dress and went to the corner store. She brought back a jar of instant coffee and some canned milk and asked him to please stay. She loved him, she truly did, and was sorry that she wasn't paying more attention to his needs. This was the first time she had ever lived with anybody and there was still so much for her to learn. She needed all his help and patience. She needed him to teach her how to take care of him. He could ask her for anything, for her very blood, and she would gladly give it to him. She detached the antique brooch that held together the bodice of her dress, cut open the tip of her finger with its pin and smeared her blood onto his lips. He wiped it off with the back of his hand.

He was more agreeable after a few cups of coffee, though Ariadne was on edge and trying to hide it. This was all much more complicated than she thought it would be, full of pitfalls and snares. Coffee, she took a mental note. Make sure there's always coffee. But what else might she forget?

Then there was the ongoing dispute about the stereo. Though it was taken for granted that what was hers was his, what was Yannis' was not to be tampered with. Ariadne was forbidden to touch his records, lest she put a scratch in a favourite song.

"You think I've never played a record before?" she protested.

"You've never played my records before, and that's the way it's going to stay."

When she was feeling particularly rebellious, she'd throw one of his records onto the turntable, not caring where the needle landed. He'd always catch her, since he conducted random checks on his collection, holding the vinyl discs up to the light and inspecting their surface for fingerprints. If he caught her playing his records again, he threatened, he'd leave and never come back. After her weepy apologies, she promised she'd never touch them again, though this was a lie. The sound system sat in the middle of the room, calling to her. And his music was part of the reason she'd fallen in love with him in the first place, so to deny her just didn't seem fair. On the days he made her wait for him, she played his second album repeatedly, imagining that he sang the love songs to her alone. She reveled in the dark yearning in his voice and prayed to whatever god listened to such shallow prayers that the elusive third album would be inspired by her. For that honour, he was forgiven everything.

He made her wait often. He'd storm out in the morning in a huff about something or other and wouldn't come back until midnight, full of romance, apologies and declarations of eternal love. One night, he stood on the landing, five flights below, and serenaded her, his dulcet notes floating up into the apartment like heliotropes, tickling her eardrums until she was roused out of her troubled sleep. Ariadne never told him that she spent those days he disappeared in catatonia, prone on her double mattress, awaiting the end of the world. When he'd finally arrive, she'd wrap her arms around him and accept his mouth, his hands all over her body, and repeat her promise to give him anything he desired.

On the four-week anniversary of their cohabitation, Yannis popped the big question. "Have you ever, my love, considered trying heroin?" Ariadne took a deep breath and closed her eyes, then stepped over another line to come closer to him.

"I'm curious. But scared." She opened her eyes and found herself so close to him that she thought she could see his skull smiling through his skin. She turned to run, but it was too late.

"Don't be scared, Ariaki. I'll take care of you." He had a mischievous look in his eye, as if they were playing a game. He nuzzled her ear, and whispered the dare, "I know where we can get some. If you're interested, that is."

Ariadne adored games and little risks. She loved surprises more than anything in the world. Above all, she prized newness, the sensation of that which had never before been experienced or even conceived. Ariadne liked to think she was more cunning than the gods—in her own way immortal. Historically, this has always been a poor position for mortals.

"How much," she asked, capping the question with a nervous laugh.

"Don't worry, sweetness. I'll take care of that, too."

Yannis dressed her in the red velvet dress from Stavros' shop, pinned up her hair so that it fell in wisps around her face, dusted her cheeks with translucent white powder, and applied lipstick to her lips as carefully as she had applied her blood to his. He then ushered her out of the house, ready to initiate her into his secret society.

Yannis kissed her hand and led her up the stairs of "The Naxian," a neighbourhood drinking hole where they'd gone a hundred times before. The bar's main decorative feature was a huge fishing net that hung from the ceiling overflowing with dried, dusty seaweed and the peach-coloured body parts of dismembered mannequins. Ariadne ordered a drink then looked around for a seat. She noticed that the place seemed different tonight: the atmosphere was surreal and heavy, and the crowd more subdued than usual, their gestures deliberate, the sound of their voices muted and warped. It was as if she were watching a film in slow motion.

Yannis spotted one of the men who Ariadne recognized as Dracos, the driver of the car that had brought her home from Kolonaki on the night of the cab strike, the night

of the dream. Yannis went off into a corner with him, then came back looking agitated. He grabbed her by the hand and dragged her out of her seat before she had the chance to take a third sip of her drink. "Let's get out of here," he whispered. "I don't want these bastards to know who you are." She tripped on the hem of the red velvet dress and heard the sickening sound of fabric ripping.

"What bastards?" she asked as she was hustled out the door. She took one last look at the lethargic crowd.

"Don't look at them," he ordered. "Let's just go."

But it was too late. Ariadne had seen their red, wolverine eyes, their rotting teeth glinting behind sticky, sickly smiles. Without turning her head, she could hear their footsteps on the pavement behind them and Yannis' breathing becoming short and heavy as they rushed towards her apartment building. He quickly unlocked the building's glass door and pulled her through it. Out of the corner of her eye, Ariadne thought she saw them pressed up against the glass, salivating and crying, but when she looked again before getting into the elevator, there was no one there.

Once inside her apartment, he locked the door twice, lit a single candle and carefully unfolded a tiny blue origami envelope, inspecting the contents. He showed Ariadne the brownish powder and smiled. "Your life will never be the same again. I guarantee it." He kissed her and told her he loved her, then laid the full length mirror on the bed and separated the powder into two thick lines on its surface. He handed Ariadne a bent, yellow straw. "You go first so I can watch you, so I can see how beautiful you are."

Ariadne loomed over the mirror, considering the smaller line as she tried to avoid her own reflection. She closed her eyes and sucked the powder up in one breath, making a wish as if she were blowing out the candles of a birthday cake. "Please let me be OK," she prayed, and Yannis applauded.

"Very good, my love. Just like an old pro." He kissed her one last time before taking his line and they both sat with their backs against the wall waiting for life to change, for the white bride to sashay down the aisle with her arms outstretched, her lips pursed, ready to kiss the groom and his virgin.

33.

The drug had an unexpected effect on Ariadne, completely opposite to the fast insanity of acid or the smug giddiness of mescaline. As the brown powder travelled through her nasal cavity, dissolving into her blood stream, and dispersing in her brain, it carried with it a warm calmness. Ariadne felt as if a thick, woolly blanket had fallen over her and she had no desire to move. She stretched out on her bed and kicked off her shoes, letting the warmth envelop her. She smiled on the inside. Silly girl, she thought, how could you have been scared of this? This was the best she'd felt in months. Safe and cozy, well taken care of. She tried to turn her head towards Yannis, to see if he was as soothed as she was, but her neck wouldn't obey. It was happy where it was, so she didn't force the issue. She had a hunch that if she let go of all intentions, big and small, everything would be fine underneath the warm blanket.

Ariadne wanted to speak, to ask Yannis what he felt, but when she opened her mouth, no words came out, just a spurt of breath. The words were all buried too deep inside her, but that was all right, she decided. All she had to do was think her thoughts and they would be telepathically received by Yannis, who she loved even more right now, if that were possible. She was so glad she had followed him here into this peaceful land, where only they existed in complete harmony and without distraction. She closed her eyes and let herself sink into a plush carpet of fragrant lichen in a garden where all the flowers of the earth grew. She reached out to touch Yannis' hand, but he seemed miles and miles away, and when she tried to call him from deep inside, she was

distraught when she realized that she could no longer remember his name. She was all alone and her memory of him was quickly disintegrating. She saw him walking out of the garden and over a barren field towards a blue-orange sunset, nothing more than a silhouette, a shadow cast by a dead tree. She pried open her eyes with her fingers and stared at the ceiling, which seemed closer to her than usual. If the roof fell in on her right this minute, she recognized, she would not have the strength to get up and save herself. It didn't matter, another voice within her reasoned. Her brain was free; it floated up against the ceiling and looked down upon her and her lover, whatever his name was.

From above Ariadne looked content, as if in the midst of a pleasant dream, her face innocent as a little girl's, the corners of her mouth curled in a half-grin. Yannis was still sitting up with his back against the wall. His head lolled forward, snapping back every few minutes. He looked shrunken and weak, bereft of his charm, hunched over like an old man, drooling out of the corners of his mouth. He held a cigarette between his yellowed fingers, its falling embers burning tiny holes into the sheets.

Ariadne grimaced as if a moth had flown in past her parted lips, its wings fluttering dustily up against her palate. The moth introduced a surly, hirsute creature with horns into her dream world that ruined the landscape with its presence, trampling the tiger lilies, spitting on the saxifrage. It was then that the terrible lucidity set in. She pushed the monster away from her, screamed at him to get out of her garden. She kicked and punched out at the air in front of her. She tore at her hair and clawed at her breast. "How," she yelled in its ear, "did you even get in?"

"What?" Yannis stammered. "Did you say something, my love?" He brushed the ashes from his clothes and lit another cigarette. "How are you feeling, Ariaki?" He reached out and touched her face, and she involuntarily flinched. His touch brought her back down from the ceiling and into her body, but the relentless lucidity wouldn't go away. She pulled herself up against the wall and held her head in her hands, afraid to look at him, terrified of what he had mutated into.

"I must have fallen asleep, or something." she said nervously, her eyes still closed.
"It's like I wasn't even here."

Yannis stroked her neck. "That wasn't sleep, lover. That was *mastura*, the high that takes you into parts of yourself that you never even knew existed. Did you have a vision, my light?"

"No," she lied, suddenly paranoid. She slowly uncovered one eye to peek at him, then the other. "It was like a deep sleep, nothing at all."

"You'll get used to it." He took her into his arms. "And when you do we'll go places together, just you and me. Who needs the rest of the world when we're here together." He wrapped his limbs around her and squeezed until she could hardly breathe. "Fuck them, I say. All those bastards who said we'd never make it. Let's get married and show them all."

Yannis rambled on for what seemed like hours, pledging his love, laying out plans for their future together, and vowing eternal devotion without ever letting go of her. He described, in detail, the house where they would live. He imagined every wall covered in Salvador Dali's art: "The Metamorphosis of Narcissus" in the kitchen, "Swans Reflecting Elephants" in the living room, and the improbably named "One Second Before Awakening from a Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee Around a Pomegranate" over a red velvet divan in his music studio, placed there for Ariadne to recline upon when he was working. This last image, he said, was his favourite, but Ariadne just shrugged. The bathroom, he continued, would be made entirely of black marble, and he saw her soaking in a pool of milk, bleaching her skin as white as porcelain, as white as a bride's. Deep purple rose petals would be scattered throughout the house daily so that the floors would never be cold and the air would always be fragrant. Most significant was the portrait that would hang above their bed. He saw a figurative drawing in charcoal of the two of them making love. "So everyone will see how beautifully we fit...blessed by the gods... fated...I am you, you are me..."

These were things that Ariadne had been dying to hear on all those days when he left her stranded on the island of her double mattress, waiting for him to come back and rescue her from her misery. If his mood hadn't turned by the time he got home, he was dismissive of her grief, defensive when asked where he'd been, no matter how lightly the question was put.

"What are we, married?" he'd call out disdainfully from the kitchen as he ate whatever he could find before leaving again, pushing her back into the apartment if she followed him to the elevator, slamming the door in her face and locking her in.

But tonight, the white bride was jealous and playing tricks. As soon as Ariadne could lift her leaden limbs, she got out of bed and moved to a chair across the room. The chair became a throne, and she looked down upon Yannis as he pleaded for his life. "Why have you left me here all alone? Don't you love me anymore now that I'm all yours?"

"Sure I love you," she replied coolly. "I just needed some space. You know how it is." Yannis burst into tears.

"Don't leave me, I beg you. I could never live without you..." He crawled over to her, buried his face in her lap.

"Put on some music, Yannis. And while you're up, get me something to eat. I'm famished. Does *preza* do that?" She reached out to stroke his hair then changed her mind. It was so hard to respect the pathetically-in-love, she thought. They lost all sense of decorum.

In the kitchen, Yannis communed with the fruit flies that buzzed around his face as he clumsily put together a snack, while Ariadne leaned back comfortably in the magnificent throne she had just ascended. "Just as it should be," she said, not realizing that she was speaking her thoughts out loud. "The power structure has shifted." A surge of confidence welled up inside her.

She saw herself clearly in a future where Yannis did not exist. He and his friends were weaklings, she decided, unfit for life and definitely beneath her. Tomorrow she would throw him out on his skinny, lazy ass and start all over again in Athens. With her new confidence she would find others as strong as she was, not miserable addicts who squirmed around her like cockroaches in the dark. She'd never marry such a loser. What had she been thinking?

Yannis came back with a toasted sandwich of melted Camembert and a few green grapes on the side. She ate the sandwich greedily, staring at him with contemptuous amusement. She allowed him to feed her the grapes one by one. Tomorrow she would be free. She spoke this out loud again when she imagined she was thinking. She laughed and Yannis laughed with her, hoping that everything would be fine. He loved her deeply, he said, with all his body and soul. These thoughts slipped out of his mouth before he could stop them. Yannis laid his cheek on her crumb-dusted lap. He loved her more than himself, he confessed, as he drank in her laugh like cyanide.

Unfortunately, this state of grace didn't last for either of them. The next morning Yannis woke up in a foul mood, stomped out of the apartment without any indication as to when or if he would return. Ariadne clung to the sides of her mattress as if she had been shipwrecked and the raging sea threatened to swallow her and the rotting plank that kept her afloat. When he came back late that night, he was irritated because he hadn't found a speck of heroin anywhere in the city. He called her worthless, and cursed himself for wasting half of the previous night's score on her. He turned his back to her in bed and kicked her in his sleep. When she showed him the bruise the next morning, he shrugged. Dreams never lied, he said, then left her floating on her bed, alone and unwanted.

In the months that followed, Ariadne would come to idealize that first night on heroin together, to crave and believe in the unbridled love Yannis had expressed,

forgetting the contempt that she'd felt for him. She emptied her bank account, hoping the part of him that loved her so deeply might be coaxed out again by the magic brown dust. But Yannis seemed to have forgotten that night completely; it was too long ago, to many shots ago in junk time. As the weeks passed and her savings evaporated, he got meaner and meaner, and she began to long for those few moments she knew him when he was clean.

In the meantime, odd things were happening inside Ariadne's body, sensations comparable to the euphoria that Yannis felt at the sight of the needle, that old rusted spike wrapped in plastic, hidden outside the bathroom window. For Ariadne it was the sound of the elevator scraping towards the fifth floor, the groaning of the cables, and the key turning in the lock that started her heart pounding in anticipation. When Yannis walked through the door, no matter what state he was in, Ariadne experienced the same feeling of warmth, of intense peace that she'd felt that first night on heroin. The night when she almost escaped.

34.

One afternoon Ariadne was alone in her apartment, trying to take a nap while the siesta hammering, scourge of the fishwife, was reaching its peak. She had recently identified the mysterious noise as some sadistic quirk of the elevator's, and she passed this information on to the man at the corner store, hoping he would mention it to the fishwife and get her to stop banging on her ceiling with a broomstick. Yannis was missing along with her peace of mind and a small gold ring set with a cubic zirconia in the shape of a pearl. Ariadne did not connect Yannis' disappearance to that of the ring. She suspected she had either misplaced it or that it had slipped off her finger while she was running for the trolley that morning, already formulating an alibi for her lateness. Each successive lie to her current employer escalated in both its improbability and

magnitude. The week before she told her boss that her building had caught on fire, describing in detail the colour of the flames and the odour of a cat burning. Now there was nowhere to go in the spectrum of excuses but death. Once this inevitability was accepted, her only decision involved who Charon had carried off. A parent, a grandparent, or a favourite uncle? None of these victims was appropriate since a designated period of mourning would be expected of her after the loss of such a close relative, and the bright blue dress she was wearing would immediately give her away. It would have to be a stranger, someone, perhaps, who had gotten in the trolley's way, whose last sight was the greased and twisted metal organs of the monster that killed him.

No excuse was required, so the imaginary dead man was instantly resurrected. Upon reaching the opposite sidewalk, he lit a cigarette and bought a lottery ticket from a passing vendor, oblivious to the fact that his number had already almost come up. When Ariadne arrived at the bakery she'd been working at for the past month, she was fired before she had the chance to open her mouth. She turned her back to the abuse the baker hurled at her in the overheated shop and stepped out into the early morning sun. Except for the loss of the day-old loaves of bread and the week-old pastries that were the fringe benefits of the job, Ariadne was relieved to be let go. She could now catch up on her sleep during the day after staying up all night long with Yannis.

She had lost track of her lover in the last month since their schedules had diverged. He went to bed just as she was getting ready to go to work, and he was gone by the time she got home for siesta. He never left a note indicating where he'd gone, when he'd be back, or asking her to meet him somewhere later that evening, though she persisted in searching the apartment for a note like a piece of hidden treasure. When she mentioned that she might appreciate a sign of life from him because she worried when he was gone too long, his invective left her in a tizzy. Wasn't it enough for her that his

clothes, his toothbrush, his TV and stereo sat there in her apartment insuring his eventual return? Did she expect him to stitch his underwear to hers, so they could walk around like mismatched Siamese twins? (Yes, yes, she did, but knew enough not to say so.) His life on the outside was separate from their life in the apartment, and that's how he wanted it to stay; she didn't own him just because she fucked him. What he did when he was out there (he pointed out the kitchen window) was none of her damned business. And if she didn't like it, if this was not the type of arrangement she wanted, then it was up to her to extract herself from it. "Leave me a note," he taunted, "when you've made your decision," taking for granted that she was powerless to decide. In the end, Ariadne consented to live a secret life with him, like the mistress of a married man.

Upon returning to her apartment, freed from the bakery, Ariadne stretched out on top of the bed covers, fully clothed, and began to drift off. She had learned to ignore the elevator and the fishwife's one-sided war of the broomstick. They had become part of her routine, like shooing the white birds that congregated on her balcony with her own long-handled broom. She'd probably lost the ring, she thought, as she was rocked by waves of sleep, though she didn't truly remember putting it on that morning. She had a bad habit of always losing her favourite things.

Apart from the sound of the hammering elevator and the banging from below, a third knocking sound outside the door joined in with the first two rhythms. It was this third, unexpected rhythm that reached Ariadne before she crossed over into deep sleep. She opened one eye and squinted at the clock. It was only 3:30—she hadn't even been asleep for fifteen minutes. Initially, she suspected the fishwife of riding the elevator the one flight between their respective apartments, prepared to rant and rave loud enough to wake everyone in the building with her accusations (hell hath no fury like a paranoid fishwife ignored). But the fishwife was still at her post, tirelessly jabbing her broomstick right under Ariadne's bed.

Her second guess was that the siesta knocker might be Yannis, who had perhaps lost his key. This had happened a few weeks ago, and he'd cursed her because she had been trapped in an afternoon dream where her white marble floor had given way beneath her, and she could neither immediately rescue herself from the fishwife's fat grasp nor wake herself up to let him in. The next day she hid an extra key on the roof beneath a brick, so the knocker could not be a keyless, aggravated Yannis.

She considered that it might be Medea, but dismissed the notion immediately, since she was supposed to see her friend in a few days—on Medea's day off from the dog house—and it was Ariadne's turn to make the cross-town journey. Yet the knocking continued and Ariadne heard whispering in the hallway. She tip-toed to her door and pressed her ear it, but didn't recognize the voices. Since there was no peephole, her choices were to swing the door wide open and catch the whisperers by surprise or ask the voices to identify themselves and then decide what to do.

"*Nai, pios einai?*" she asked quietly through the closed door. She heard a clearing of throats and then a woman's voice whispering conspiratorially.

"We're friends of Yannis. We need to talk to him. Is he in?"

Ariadne hesitated, unsure of what to do. Yannis had forbidden her any sort of contact with his friends, except for Stavros, and she was even to steer clear of his best buddy's shop if Yannis was not there to supervise. When they went to bars or dance clubs as a couple, Yannis deposited her in the darkest corner where she was virtually invisible. This explained his earlier behaviour with the anonymous women at the Pit, where they did not go anymore—much to the chagrin of the Pitsters, whose stories about the couple had taken bizarre and violent twists having been left entirely to imaginations nourished by songs about ritual mutilation and slaughter. Yannis had multiple reasons for rejecting the Pit, laid out for Ariadne like commandments any time she hinted she might like to go there for old times' sake.

"We cannot grace those losers with our presence. Don't tell me you miss them now that you have me?" Ariadne shook her head no.

"All they'll do is stare at us and talk behind our backs." (*This was not only true, but was happening anyway.*)

"I don't want you talking to anyone but me, and I don't want you talking to anyone about me. Do you understand?" Ariadne nodded yes, even though she did not understand. Of all of his prohibitions, this one was the hardest one for her to self-enforce. Half of being in love, after all, involved talking about it ad nauseam, as if you were the first to have fallen into its miraculous embrace. This was what Yannis hoped to regulate: by isolating her from his associates and the Pitsters, he was protecting himself from scrutiny.

Ariadne had so much to say about Yannis that she often felt like her brain was going to explode, words pouring out of her ears, her eyes and her nostrils, jumbled and nonsensical, but nonetheless free. She didn't even dare write the words down in her journal since the day he found the entry about their first night on heroin and tore it up. Her punishment was the silent treatment for the rest of the evening. Letters to whatever friends she still had back in Montreal might have served as a pressure release, her testimonies sealed in an envelope and sent flying over the sea like the golden star, the blue airplane, the white lacy bird out of the fifth floor windows. But the few times she tried to write one of these letters, she found herself blocked, as if an ice cold hand was encircling her throat, another one grabbing and twisting the wrist of her writing hand until she was sure she could see a purplish-blue mark rising on her thin skin. In any case, she didn't believe she could effectively convey the scope of their relationship, the beauty and intensity of its chiaroscuro, through words. Or perhaps she had not yet found a vocabulary that could do it justice. Instead, she sent out a few terse postcards without enough lines for anyone to read between: "In love with a musician named Yannis. All is well and I am happy." This blurring of fact and exaggeration, perfected in her initial epic

letters home, was not lost on her, but she chose to ignore it as a minor aggravation like the fishwife. Yes, he was a musician and she did believe herself to be in love. But was all well? Relatively speaking, when he was with her it was and she was often happy (though the feeling might have been better described as a type of grinning vertigo). When he was missing, however—as he was now—what she felt was a torment worse than what she experienced during her first months in Athens when she was convinced she was disappearing. It was far worse, she thought, to be known and then spurned, than never to have been known at all.

Perhaps these friends of Yannis', standing outside her door, could shed some light on the part of his life from which she was excluded, could, by association, bring her in. She inched the door open and whispered, "Come in," and the pair slipped through the crack like shadows.

The woman, who introduced herself as Poly, reminded Ariadne of a scarecrow with her long, straggly hair, her voluminous skirt made out of patches of yellow and brown fabric, and the dozen or so chains around her neck which were turning her skin green. Ariadne could not determine whether Poly was really old and trying to look young in her ridiculous get-up or whether she was indeed young and had gone prematurely grey as a result of some terrible fright. Studying the thin lines shooting out horizontally from the corners of Poly's eyes and vertically from her upper lip towards her nostrils, Ariadne decided on the former. Poly sat down in one of the canvas chairs and lit a cigarette.

"So this is where Vissinos has been holed up." She looked around the room, then laughed. "How quaint." She flicked her ashes onto the white marble floor.

"Where's our boy, Ariadne," Poly's obviously younger companion asked, popping his head into the kitchen. "You're not hiding him from us, are you?" His name was Tassos and Ariadne thought she recognized him from the Pit, but she wasn't sure. If you

put them in a police line up, all those pale-faced, skinny young men dressed in black would look pretty much alike: an unkindness of ravens, a murder of crows.

"Have we met before?" she asked Tassos, still trying to place him.

"Oh, I've seen you around with Vissinos. At the Naxian, at Babis' Place, you know, your man's usual haunts. You must be a very bad girl the way he always makes you sit in the corner by yourself." Both he and Poly sniggered and Ariadne could tell they were laughing at her. She was already regretting letting them in.

"What do you want with Yannis?" She looked from Poly's face to Tassos' but had to avert her eyes from their glassy stares. "He's not here right now, you know."

"We already figured that one out. Unless he's hiding in the bathroom. Do you mind if I... freshen up?" Ariadne pointed towards the closed bathroom door, and Poly left the room.

"I'm not sure when he'll be back," she said to Tassos. "He had all sorts of important business to take care of today," she lied. "Are you one of his business associates?" Anything was possible.

"You could call me that," he replied. "We certainly have some business to settle."

Poly emerged from the bathroom looking flushed. This was a look Ariadne now recognized. "Do you mind if we wait for him?" Poly's movements were sluggish and she slurred her words. She settled back in the chair and stretched her legs onto Tassos' lap. "We really need to talk to him. You understand."

"It'll give us a chance to get to know you better, Ariadne. Yannis can be so selfish with his friends." Tassos licked his lips then smiled without parting them.

Ariadne was seized by a quiet panic when she pictured the scene Yannis would cause if he came home and found them there talking to her. How would she get rid of them? She could tell them she had places to go, people to see, but they might dog her around town then right back to the apartment. She could simply ask them to leave, but what was to keep them from sitting in the hallway and waiting for him anyway? And

what if they refused to go? Even if she had a phone, there wasn't anyone she could call for help. She took a deep breath and tried hard not to squirm under their unflagging gaze. They looked like little hungry animals, and the best she could do under the circumstances was to offer them some food before they took a bite out of her. "Would you like something to eat or drink?" she offered. Playing hostess, she thought, was a good way to regain control of the situation, the apartment, and herself.

She went into the kitchen and prepared some of Yannis' instant coffee, making a mental note to buy another jar before the corner store closed for the day. From the other room, she heard her guests whispering to each other; she heard her name and then Poly laughed. When Ariadne came back into the living room, she caught the other woman going through Yannis' records and nearly dropped the tray.

"What do you think you're doing," she gasped. She put the tray down on a speaker.

"Are these Yannis'?" Poly asked, pulling a record out of its sleeve and studying the label. Yannis stamped his name on every one of his records—both sides. "I guess so," Poly answered for herself. "Can we play this one? I haven't heard it in a while." She handed Ariadne *Seven Virgins, Seven Boys*, leaving her thumb prints on side A.

Ariadne took the record from her and quickly ran a cloth over the prints. "I don't think so," she replied, shaking her head in disbelief. "It's still siesta." Ariadne noticed that the hammering in the elevator shaft and the fishwife's banging had stopped.

Poly cackled knowingly. "I guess he hasn't dropped his neurotic little rule about his records yet, eh? When we were going out..."

Ariadne brought a hand to her chin to keep her mouth from falling open. She tried to remain composed. "You went out with my Yannis?" She laughed nervously and blood rose to her cheeks.

"Don't worry, my pretty. It was years and years ago, when he was starting out. You might say we shared the same passion." Poly giggled girlishly, which made her look wizened and ugly.

Ariadne found herself staring glassy-eyed at Poly's face. Could she be an older version of the woman on Yannis' wall? No, Yannis could never have loved such a hag. So who was she and what did she want? Ariadne could not find the right words to ask that question.

"Here's your coffee," Ariadne finally said, pushing a cup into Poly's hands. With some effort, Tassos got up and carefully lifted the second cup from the tray.

Ariadne learned nothing from Poly and Tassos, who sat there on her canvas chairs for two and a half hours that afternoon. She never found out what they wanted with Yannis, and she evaded all questions they asked her about him though the decrepit couple kept exchanging glances as if they knew all about her secret life. Luckily, their patience for waiting wore out long before Ariadne's did, long before Yannis returned that night in a mood that could best be described as neutral.

On their way out they asked her to tell Yannis they'd dropped by, but Ariadne was already erasing their visit from her mind. After she shut the door and double-locked it, she washed the coffee cups and rubbed out the last traces of Poly's thumbprints from side A. She got on her knees and swept up the cigarette ashes, the footprints, the lingering shadows her guests left behind, then emptied the dust pan out the kitchen window. She opened the balcony door and invited in an evening breeze, which took a tour of the small apartment and carried out the last vestiges of the visit. By the time Yannis returned, Ariadne had almost convinced herself that no one had been there, that nothing had happened. When he asked her how her day had been, she told him about losing her job at the bakery and her favourite ring. Yannis shrugged and looked neither guilty nor innocent.

35.

Perhaps this affair between Ariadne and Yannis has been painted with too heavy a brushstroke, like those enormous unicoloured works in modern art galleries that make the viewer wonder how anyone ever saw merit in a canvas entirely painted black. There must have been at least a few moments of levity that justified Ariadne's ongoing, obsessive and debilitating love for Yannis. Some chink of light within the vastness of that black canvas, hidden beneath the layers of paint, and discernible to the observer patient and experienced enough to appreciate the subtle composition and the texture of the surface. Interested enough to try to understand the artist's motive. Envious enough to covet the work of art.

Such an observer existed for the dark art of Ariadne and Yannis' affair. A person so drawn to the blackness, so blinded by the sudden flash of light that she dreamed of scratching out the artist's initials in the bottom corner, replacing them with her own. Since the day Medea came to Ariadne's door and was repelled by the sounds of lovemaking within, she began painting her own portrait of the relationship over the original canvas. Violent slashes of red paint obscured the black base, imbuing it with blood lust, dangerous and irresistible.

Medea found Ariadne on her stoop one morning. The black half-moons under Ariadne's eyes, Medea observed, accentuated the cracked redness in the whites. Her suffering made Ariadne all the more beautiful to Medea. The bottomlessness of her torment made her seem ethereal, an apparition who was both blessed and cursed by the love of the gods and was left to wander sadly between heaven and earth, unable to rest on either plane. She guided her friend into her apartment and handed her a tumbler of brandy.

Ariadne told Medea everything that morning: the waiting, the fighting, the guitar case that sat beside the door, packed and ready to travel. Yannis left it there as a

reminder to her that their time together was limited and could come to an end at any moment, due to any small action or infraction that could never be predicted. He changed his mind so often. What he loved about her one day, he despised the next. Ariadne wept as she told her friend how she was sure that she would die without him. She buried her face in Medea's bosom.

"There, there." Medea smoothed Ariadne's tangled hair. "At least you have someone to love." A tear slid down Medea's face, a decoction of her envy and rancour which dropped into Ariadne's tresses and disappeared. "Look at it this way," she added, a hint of impatience in her voice, "if he didn't love you at all, he probably would have left by now. He tells you he loves you sometimes, doesn't he?" She took a deep breath and released an agitated sigh.

Ariadne had some nerve unloading her petty love problems on her after she'd repeatedly ignored her advances, stood her up a dozen times because Yannis wanted to go to the movies, or Yannis wanted her to come to Stavros' shop with him, or Yannis just plain wanted her at home because he was there and he had nothing better to do. Medea would sit in her apartment fully dressed for their date, her purse perched on her lap. She'd invoke ancient curses that were believed to turn intestines into snakes that gnawed away the hearts and spleens of their victims. She'd then get ready for work, spraying herself with extra cologne so she wouldn't have to endure the smell of the dog house, the reek of the dirty old men in cheap, stained suits who were too stupid to buy a hooker. How dare Ariadne come to her now, when things had soured, Medea bristled. When all was well she never heard from her and occasionally took the streetcar to the other side of town in hopes of finding her friend at home. Most often Ariadne was not in.

Medea didn't have any other friends in Athens, blaming her friendlessness on the lifestyle she led. All her nights were spent at the dog house, all her days spent recovering. She was too ashamed to tell her old friends back in her home town how she spent every night, what she had been reduced to, and new ones were hard to make when

she slept the day away behind the darkness of blue canvas curtains pulled against the all-knowing sun, against the unrelenting flow of normalcy just outside her window. Medea had no pity to spare for anyone else.

A week later when Medea arrived unannounced at Ariadne's door, she found her friend wild-eyed and ecstatic. Ariadne skipped around the apartment, singing and laughing, picking up flowers that had been strewn all over the white marble floor and tossing them over her head so that they showered both women with their soft petals. Yannis' second album was on the turntable and his voice, with its faint Greek accent seasoning the English lyrics, filled the room. Ariadne swayed, singing along with him, and it was only when she danced past the full length mirror, stopping to serenade herself and blow a kiss, that Medea noticed the words scrawled across its surface in bright red lipstick. Ariadne kissed the mirror as if it were a holy icon, leaving her lip print on the glass, staining her mouth with the imprint of the words, "I love you." Two red candles burned at either side of the mirror, another two sat at the foot of the bed—the second set unlit, promising a burning later that night. On her pillow lay a chaplet of yellow poppies.

"What the hell's going on here? Have you lost your mind?" Medea turned the volume down on the stereo, grabbed Ariadne by the wrist and pushed her into a chair. "Or are you throwing a party you didn't invite me to."

Ariadne jumped out of her seat. "I found it like this when I came home. The flowers, the candles, the crown, the message. OK, he ruined my best lipstick, but who cares?" She resumed her dancing and singing, turned the volume back up even louder and tried to get Medea to join in the celebration.

"I'm not in the mood," Medea grumbled. "Can you please sit still for just a second. You're like a crazy woman."

"I am a crazy woman. I'm crazy in love and I don't care who knows it. Look at this." She held out a small silver box with a Byzantine cross engraved on its lid. "He saved me half his..." She hesitated. "Left it on my pillow. I don't want it and I'll give it back to him... But just the fact that he wanted me to have it..."

"You have lost your mind." Medea opened the box, rubbed a little bit of the brownish powder between her fingertips. "Why don't you want it? I thought you liked it." She brought her fingers to her mouth, tasted the brown dust and made a sour face.

"It was fun the first few times, but then I started getting scared. I was walking towards Venizelou Avenue to catch the trolley one morning and I was feeling fine, when out of nowhere I got this cramp right here." She rubbed the space between her breasts. "It felt like I was being stabbed in the back and I had to sit down for five minutes to catch my breath. I decided right then and there that I couldn't afford to get sick. One of us has to keep working so that he can make his third album. It's going to be amazing. One of the songs is going to be about me."

Ariadne's latest job was at a nearby hotel. She started at 7am and went straight through to 3pm—Monday to Wednesday. She still stayed up all night to keep Yannis company and would go into work bleary-eyed and cranky, hardly able to keep track of the middle-aged couples who came in at lunch time, renting rooms for an hour, or sometimes less.



Earlier that day, while Yannis waited for the spike to be passed to him, Stavros asked him how Ariadne was doing. She hadn't stopped by his shop for quite some time now, and he wondered if everything between them was OK. He liked Ariadne, he told Yannis and winked. She was all right.

"She is," Yannis replied, turning his eyes away from Stavros. "She's been working at this sleazy hotel—you know, the Thisavros, by the race tracks—putting up with shit from the gamblers and the *putanes* they pick up when they win, so I can make my third album. So I don't have to work."

When Stavros asked him how the album was going, Yannis shook his head. The album wasn't going anywhere, he never seemed to find the time, the inspiration, the motivation. He'd only managed to write one song, and he was pretty sure it was bad. He didn't know what was wrong with him, and he could never admit to Ariadne that he was fucking up. "That's where she thinks I am right now. In the studio I set up in my room at the old folk's home." The needle was finally his. "I don't deserve her, you know. She's too good for me. Even my father said so, and though he's usually full of shit, I know that this time he's right. She deserves better." He pulled the rubber tight around his arm with his teeth and fired up.

Ariadne had collapsed a few days earlier. Malnutrition, the doctor had diagnosed over the phone, due to lack of food in the cupboards and perhaps a touch of anemia. All the money she had socked away in the bank in case of emergency had gone to take care of Yannis' "little eccentricity," as he called it. She lay fetally in her bed, unable to lift her head to drink from the glass of water he had brought her along with a couple of downers. She looked at him with faraway eyes and shook her head no. He paced the room frenetically, asking himself out loud what to do for her, what the fuck to do. Then it struck him.

"Baby," he whispered, since he believed the walls had ears, "I have a little heroin left, and I know you hate needles, but it won't do you any good if you snort it, there just isn't enough. If you let me hit you, I'm sure you'll feel better right away. OK, baby?"

Yannis lifted her limp arm and tied his belt around it. He tried to back up her vein, tapping the crease of her elbow like a safe-cracker looking for a hollow, but her vein wouldn't rise to the occasion. "Damn it, they're small." He tried the other arm.

What Yannis was up to slowly reached Ariadne deep in her delirium. Through heavy eyelids she saw him stick his arm through the bathroom window, feel along the ledge for his overused, dull syringe. He sat at the edge of the mattress and prepared the powder and the lemon, scorching the bottom of the already-bent spoon with his lighter, using a cotton ball to absorb the bubbling liquid. He sucked the liquid into the cylinder with the expertise of a nuclear chemist. "Are you ready for this, Ariaki? Now you'll see how it works." He tried again to coax her small vein out of hiding, "Don't be shy," he cooed. With what little strength she had left, Ariadne pulled her arm away.

"No." She struggled to speak. "That's not what I need. If you put that shit in me, I'll be sick again in a few hours. Even sicker. What I need is food." She began to cry.

For a moment Yannis stood there baffled, not understanding how she could turn down his fairy dust, but if she didn't want it, that just meant more for him. He quickly tied up his own arm, banged the needle into himself. It wasn't enough juice for his usual high, but it gave him a small kick, like a chaser to his morning fix. "You just stay there," he said, suddenly calm and thinking straight. "I'll go back to my parent's house and bring back something to eat, OK? Please be OK." She nodded weakly. He kissed her and ran off, and she was sure that this time he would never return.

"It's lucky my old man likes her," Yannis told Stavros, who was nodding off. "He took me to the supermarket, filled up a grocery cart, then drove me back to her apartment."

"Didn't give you money, the old goat," Stavros mumbled.

"He knows better than that. Before I shut the car door, he looked at me with the face of a gravedigger and said, 'She's a good girl. When she finds out what you're really like, she'll leave you.'"

It might have been the immediate effects of the heroin, but a melancholia settled upon Yannis and tears began streaming down his face. He wiped them off his cheeks before anyone else noticed and decided to go home right away. He had to tell Ariadne

that he loved her. They'd had a fight about nothing in particular last night and he knew she hadn't had much sleep before she went to her job in the morning. When he told his associates he had to go, they protested. "What about the rest of the stuff? Aren't you going to share it with us *tsigouni*—you miserly bastard?"

"It's for Ariadne," he replied with his father's solemnity. "It belongs to her."

"Wow," one of the perpetually-gone uttered. "You must really love her."

Spurred on by that rare burst of affection for Ariadne, Yannis rushed home, picking up candles at the corner store, stealing flowers from a nearby cemetery, including a crown of poppies from the stele of a little girl. When he got home with his peace offerings, Ariadne was still at work. He swept and washed the floor (activities heretofore unknown), spread the flowers like a carpet, lit the candles, put on the record and laid the crown ceremonially on her pillow. At the last moment he was inspired by the mirror. He scrawled the love note in Indian Red and thought of how often they'd stood together before the mirror, staring at each other, studying themselves, and looking for where they were the same. Sometimes that staring went deeper than when they looked each other in the eyes, as if the mirror's flat surface was Perseus' shield against the gorgon Medusa, protecting each one from the other's power.

There were no pictures of them, Yannis suddenly regretted. He would have loved to stick a picture to the mirror to simulate her presence and their secret game. He wanted pictures to confirm the existence of his new life, to prove it to his cronies. Pictures of him, pictures of her, and of the two of them locked in an embrace. He ran out of the apartment to find a camera, a silent witness to the profound artistry of their life together.

Meanwhile, Ariadne came home from work and was immediately struck by the sound of his voice coming through her apartment door. For that music, she thought, she forgave him everything. When she saw that her apartment had been turned into a shrine, she fell to her knees amongst the flowers and thanked the deities for him. The trial was

over now; she felt it in her gut. She stood up and began to dance around the small room, slowly and deliberately. As she lost herself in the slow-spinning motion of her dance, she heard a knock on the door. She ran to open it, thrilled that someone had arrived who she could invite into her shrine. Here was a witness to help her recall this day, someone to assure her that it wasn't all a dizzying daydream brought on by lack of sleep.



Medea was about to leave when she heard a key turning in the lock. She sat back down and made herself comfortable, pushing a cigarette into a long holder that one of her dirty old men had given her and posing with it between her fingers. She had never seen Yannis before, except in the one dog-eared picture that Ariadne carried around in her wallet.

Ariadne rushed to the door to greet him and threw her arms around his neck before he had a chance to say a word.

"You like it, Ariaki?" Yannis smiled, looking over Ariadne's shoulder at his labour. As he hugged her back he noticed a short, overly-painted woman sitting at the edge of her seat, staring at him without blinking. "We have company, I see." He returned her stare and pulled himself out of Ariadne's embrace.

"Oh, this is Medea." Ariadne had almost forgotten her friend was still there.

"I've heard a lot about you." Medea offered her hand. "All bad."

"Good to know that my reputation still precedes me. It saves a lot of apologies later. You should know that with a name like Medea." Yannis tucked his hands in his jacket pockets.

"What's in a name," Ariadne interjected. She wrapped her arms around him again, and planted a loud, sloppy kiss on his cheek. "You wouldn't abandon me on an island, cold and defenseless, would you, my Theseus?"

"Never," he replied melodramatically, then looked towards Medea as if he were performing and this woman with her matching shoes and purse was the only critic in the audience. He resented her immediately. They never had any visitors, why today of all days? All he wanted to do was be alone with Ariadne. He wanted to follow her around the apartment with his camera and take pictures of her while she washed her face, brushed her hair, took off her clothes and held her arms out to him, her naked body covered in flower petals ready to receive him. He stared at this inconvenient Medea, willing her to leave. She fidgeted, only slightly, in her seat. She sensed what he wanted and refused to be so easily dismissed. She was here to see her friend Ariadne, who was hers long before he came along.

Feeling the tension, Ariadne began to babble, desperately looking for a subject that all three of them could share. She looked from Yannis' face to Medea's as if they were opponents in a tennis match, hoping to see the tension melt, and just when she thought all was lost, Yannis saved her.

"Medea," he asked, "do you know how to use a camera?"

"No," she replied. "But sometimes I paint."

36.

There is only one word for both jealousy and envy in Greek: Zylia, which marries covetousness to loss. This synthesis makes perfect sense since it erases the fine line between the two emotions; more often than not, what we covet is the same thing we're beginning to lose to someone else. Sometimes it is even a thing or a person we never owned, or even conceived of owning, in the first place; Zylia springs from our sense of entitlement.

In Greek myth there is no goddess, Fury or Harpy named Zylia, though both immortals and mortals have been visited by her, have found themselves at her mercy. To be immune to Zylia's dastardly charms is to be dead. Though she might have been suitably related to Nemesis, she could have just as easily been one of the Muses, a twisted sister of Erato, Meplomene or Thalia, since much of creation is a product of Zylia's power. Poets have engaged in violent duels of verse for the love of a Nereid, a Maenad, or the girl next door; great composers have released their rancour, their passion, their anguish in soaring symphonies meant to demolish their rivals, both private and public; and painters have most callously painted over the careful works of others, wiping masterpieces out of existence, burying them and their creators alive.

This inconvenient Medea with her matching, olive-coloured purse and shoes and her ludicrous cigarette holder feels entitled to Ariadne, though the object of her affection is unaware of the extent of Medea's longing. She does not know that Medea has loved her, or at least has lusted after her with the same fervour as a man from the first moment she slipped her the note in the dog house, telling her to run. Ariadne does not recognize the signs, is unable to read them, just as it never occurs to her that men she has no interest in might be interested in her. Her radar only picks up signals she is looking for. Not that Medea is repulsive to Ariadne, she has just never imagined that sort of union, it has never crossed her mind, despite the bouquets Medea brings her when she visits, or the notes she leaves in Ariadne's mailbox so it will not be empty, or the caresses she regularly lavishes upon Ariadne, accompanied by avowals of love and commitment. Medea constantly tells Ariadne she loves her with all her heart, that she cherishes their relationship, and that if it weren't for their friendship, she would have abandoned Athens and the dog house long ago. Ariadne attributes these endearments to Medea's overly-demonstrative and melodramatic nature. In other words, she ascribes Medea's actions to her undiluted Greekness.

Now it may seem simple-minded of Medea to continue to harbour the illusion that the relationship she has with Ariadne is anything but platonic, despite that one night of stolen sex

and the occasional kiss on the mouth she has convinced Ariadne is as casual as the double-barrelled cheek-kissing distributed so freely on the streets of Montreal. Not to mention that before Yannis came into the picture, Ariadne slept in Medea's bed on a regular basis and did not complain when she found Medea's arms wrapped around her in the morning. Sometimes, she even squeezed back. To the uninvolved observer, wise in the ways of the world, these few instances of random (and coerced) affection probably do not seem like enough fodder to create a full-blown relationship in Medea's mind—though, admittedly, the lovelorn need very little encouragement to continue to hope, and a few kisses, sleep-overs and hugs is more than enough to feed the fire. And it is not that Medea is unwise—she has learned many things in the dog house from the stupid men who believe she desires them—she is blinded by her own want.

How different this story might have been if Ariadne became aware of Medea's love and responded. Right now she would be on the isle of Lesbos, frolicking in the waves with Medea and Sappho's own chosen Nymphs instead of wandering Nysas, a restless and abandoned ghost. But apparently there is no detour on Ariadne's path that includes Medea as her lover. What, then, is Medea doing in Ariadne's story anyway?

Although their mythological counterparts never met, Ariadne of Crete and Medea of Aea are connected by more than their fates as women discarded by heroes. Theseus connects them. To the daughter of Minos, he was a man worth dying for, and to the daughter of Aeetes, he was a usurper who had to die.

Now, our modern-day Medea, with her shrinking cigarette in that ludicrous holder, is just one of many Medeas, just as our displaced Ariadne is only one of many Ariadnes; they are types caught in situations that recur tirelessly through time—brand new in their variations and yet sadly familiar. Their names, however, are of utmost importance. Nothing exists until it is named, and that which is without a name, that is stripped of its name, ceases to exist. This includes Love, Hate, Zylia, Medea, Yannis, and Ariadne. In her name Ariadne carries both naïveté and obsession. Medea's name also carries obsession, but coupled with a brutality capable of destroying that which she most loves. Yannis' name, as common and unspectacular as it is,

has its own advantages. As an everyman he can be Theseus, or Jason, or Heracles, or Zeus, or Poseidon. In fact, he is all of them at the same time. After the conquest, the ravishment, the spoils, he is destined to leave. There are no detours on his path to glory—it is as the gods will it.

Returning from our detour into the land of myth to the living room of the small Athens apartment with its white marble floors and a view of Piraeus from the kitchen window, we find Ariadne and Yannis and Medea (and Zylia), sitting as still as if they are posing for a portrait. Medea is as possessed by Zylia as she is by Ariadne, just as Yannis is presently possessed by both Ariadne and the white bride. This makes Medea and Yannis both natural allies and rivals.

As the afternoon ticks away, it becomes harder and harder for Medea to tell Ariadne from Zylia, Zylia from Ariadne. As she sits there, Zylia conjures many images in Medea's head: amorous images of Medea and Ariadne; violent images involving Medea and Yannis; and sadistic images of Medea punishing Ariadne for her betrayal. Medea believes herself to be a cuckold and Zylia nourishes this perception, feeds the fire in Medea's soul with caustic fuel, and orders her not to budge from the canvas chair in the corner, no matter how much Yannis wills it. A Medea not under Zylia's spell would act differently, would have the decorum to say hello to Yannis then leave the lovers to their fate, to their celebration of each other in their flower-strewn shrine. But this Medea—Zyliara—must stay, must allow her rage, her resentment and her self-pity to brew, to boil, to scorch her and all those who cross her path.

37.

The film was black and white, "...because I like extremes," Yannis said. Thirty six shots and he would direct—all Medea had to do was push the red button. He peered through the camera to set up each shot. "I'm an art fascist," he announced with a smile. "I know what I want."

Medea followed his orders, getting a vicarious thrill out of photographing Ariadne in Yannis' arms. It was as if everything she imagined, ruminated and seethed

over was being presented to her like a gift she wasn't sure she should take but could not resist tearing open anyway. She graciously accepted her role as privileged witness, invited voyeur.

In one shot Yannis pushed Ariadne up against the wall and bit into her neck as she threw her head back, his eyes seeking out the camera lens. In another, Ariadne straddled him as he sat on a chair, his chin resting on her shoulder, his hands grabbing greedily at her ass. There were one or two shots where he was alone, sitting cross-legged like a yogi with his eyes closed, his hands resting on his knees his thumbs and forefingers joined in circles. "Third album cover, what do you think, Ari?" he asked. She scrunched her nose and shook her head, unsure. He picked up his guitar and posed for another photo, closing his eyes once again, and as Medea snapped away he began to sing a song that Ariadne had never heard before. A slow song with a haunting, disturbing melody.

*Luscious, frantic and delirious
I will roast you elaborately
Put a diamond 'neath your tongue
Manipulate your bitter apparatus*

He sang the whole song, forgetting about the camera as Medea continued to shoot quickly, mesmerized by the intensity that his face expressed. She hadn't thought much of her rival up until now; another skinny junkie like all the rest who skulked around the back door of the dog house and occasionally died. But now, in the midst of song, she caught a glimpse of what Ariadne saw. Or maybe she saw him better than Ariadne did because Medea was not in love with him. She put the camera down but forgot to stop staring, undressing him with her eyes then strumming her fingers against his rib cage before kissing every blanched bone. When the song was over, Ariadne applauded enthusiastically and tears rolled down her happy face.

"Is that from the third album, Yannaki? It was just beautiful."

"That one is for you, my love." He blew her a kiss and winked.

Medea abruptly informed them that the film had almost run out, and if she might be so bold, she wanted to suggest something for the final shots. She looked only at Yannis as she spoke, making sure that he understood that it was a dare. "Why don't you both take off your clothes and get into bed," she tried to sound nonchalant. "You've done everything so far but make love." She smiled coyly, pleased with her nerve. (*Zylia* smiled, too.)

"I don't know, Medea," Ariadne replied uncomfortably. "Don't you think that's going a little too far?"

"Why not?" Medea countered. "It's not like I haven't already seen what you've got." Her eyes were still locked on Yannis. "Unless Yannis doesn't want to, of course."

Ariadne looked at Yannis, trying to make him understand that Medea's request was out of the question. Making love to him was the only time when she owned him completely. She was not willing to share the experience with anyone else, not even with her best friend, who should have known better than to ask. But Yannis wasn't looking back at Ariadne. He was engaged in a silent duel with Medea.

"Yeah, why not," Yannis responded casually.

"I won't do it. Sorry to spoil your fun." Ariadne looked at both of them angrily, then sat down on one of the chairs and started flipping through a magazine.

"C'mon, baby. It'll be just like that portrait of us I've always wanted," he cooed. "You and me in love's embrace for the world to admire. You wouldn't deprive me of that, would you?"

Ariadne had been convinced that Yannis had forgotten all about their first night on heroin when she'd become so cold that his tears froze as they ran down his dejected face, clinking like hail on the white marble floor. But the candles, the flowers, the shared heroin in the silver box, and now the reference to the portrait that was to hang above their marital bed made her think that all the things he had said about needing her that

night were true. Perhaps his desire for the photo was a proposal, her participation an acceptance.

She stripped down to her underwear, then turned her back to both of them as she slipped off her panties. She crawled under the covers and pulled them up to her chin. He slipped off his jeans and his underwear with no sign of modesty as Medea watched closely. Yannis looked over at his rival and crawled into bed with Ariadne, nestling himself between her thighs and rubbing up against her slowly.

"You don't expect me to take the picture with the two of you buried under the covers," Medea complained.

"Haven't you ever heard of foreplay? Give me a minute, *madame*." Yannis pulled the blanket over both their heads and Medea heard Ariadne giggle. Ariadne felt Yannis' cock tumeify between her legs. He reached for it blindly, guiding it inside her.

"What are you doing?" she whispered, slightly horrified.

"Come on. Let's turn her on, the horny bitch, and then leave her hanging. It'll be our little joke." He took her earlobe into his mouth, then thrust his bony hips, entering her all the way and banging up against her womb, sending aftershocks through her entire body. Ariadne bit her lip. He then threw off the covers, unveiling their joined bodies like a live work of art to Medea who, in her astonishment, forgot to snap the photo.

Medea was torn. Initially she was mesmerized by the sight of Ariadne lifting her hips rhythmically to meet his, her nipples brushing lightly against Yannis' hairless chest, and how the impact of their bodies squeezed her breasts out towards her sides. Medea willed Yannis to take Ariadne's breasts in his mouth, to vicariously fulfill her left-over, festering fantasy. As if sensing what the other woman desired, Yannis kissed Ariadne's left breast gently, then bit into the nipple, making Ariadne cry out in pain. Yannis looked over at Medea. Her face had turned an extreme shade of red, and she was having trouble controlling her breathing. When Medea realized she was being watched,

she started snapping photos again. The film ran out, but Medea continued to stare through the camera, which protected her from his gaze, provided her with an alibi.

Medea's focus slowly shifted from Ariadne to Yannis, whose body rose and fell gracefully, and whose sharp lines filled the frame. Yannis was a seasoned performer, used to being watched. He dove into Ariadne over and over with the elegance of an acrobat. Occasionally he turned his face towards Medea, staring right into the camera without missing a beat. A transformation took place within the camera lens. In her mind's eye, Medea changed places with Ariadne, lifting herself towards Yannis, biting into his mouth, leaving bruises all over his neck and chest that marked him as hers.

Medea felt herself being drawn towards the bed like a somnambulist who has wandered a long way in the dark. She placed the camera on the floor and heard herself saying mechanically that the film was finished and she had to go now. But neither Yannis nor Ariadne reacted. They were completely lost in each other, their bodies oblivious to her presence, all self-consciousness forgotten in the motion. Medea grabbed the purse that matched her shoes and let herself out without saying good-bye. When he heard the door slam, Yannis laughed. Ariadne laughed too, but not because of the door. Ariadne was climaxing and her body rejoiced.

Medea had a climax of her own on the shaky trolley ride home, her legs tightly crossed, her olive-green purse on her lap. That night after work, she did something she'd never done before. She went back to the hotel room of a customer, who beat her black and blue before whacking off and throwing her out. She cursed Ariadne, blaming her for her misery as she drew the blue canvas curtains in her bedroom and crawled into bed alone.

Section V

38.

August has descended upon Nysas like a heavy, unrelenting fever. Ariadne rides the bus to the beach crammed into a corner seat in the last row, her nose poked out the window, her nostrils sucking at the hot dusty air outside as if from an oxygen mask. Surrounding her, stinking of sweat and last night's beer and vomit, are Nysas' most undesirable visitors—the Augustines—so named for their bad taste in choosing impossible August for their sojourn.

"Only the animals come in August," Ketí warned Ariadne in mid-July as the villagers began their yearly emergency preparations: boarding up windows, piling sandbags outside their doors as if readying themselves for a hurricane or a flood. "The Augustines are the worst," Ketí grumbled. She had learned over the years that such specimens came to Nysas only to drink and to fight. They were usually too drunk for even the lamest fuck. And they were thieves, all of them. They would waltz through the SnakeSkin, trying to bargain with her on her lowest-priced items, and when she wouldn't engage in the haggle—informing them curtly that this was Greece not wretched Turkey where such churlish behaviour was acceptable—the Augustines would curse her, then try to steal whatever was hanging on display outside the store.

Ketí hated the Augustines passionately. If it didn't go against Nysas' unwritten code, she would close down her shop for the entire month and escape to one of the nearby islands that had not yet been discovered by tourists. When a few disoriented foreigners unknowingly got off the ferry at these remote ports, they were made to feel so unwelcome by the indigenous population that they fled, fearing some ancient curse would descend upon them during the night, carried on the breath of the cicadas. The

villagers were just trying to safeguard their simple way of life from the catastrophic shamelessness and the donkey-fucking that infected their more cosmopolitan neighbours. One Minotaur, one Centaur were enough for them. There were no bars or restaurants on these secret islands anyway, and the dull-eyed, unresponsive natives would just as soon watch a tourist starve to death as sell him even one warm, brown egg from their henhouse.

In August Ketí gritted her teeth and wished Nysas was peaceful and unwelcoming, and that she lived in a small white house on a cliff overlooking the endless sea, kept at bay by an immaculate white beach she could walk across barefoot in the morning without her big toe being sliced open by a beer bottle connivingly buried in the sand. She dreamed of visiting her few neighbours, and trading her fine fresh eggs for jugs of steaming goat's milk and bags of ripe figs, their green flesh bursting with sweet, blood red pulp. At night her lungs would drink in the cool sea air and not once would her nostrils recoil from the pong of shit and piss that dotted the beach, hastily covered like a cat's mess.

Many of the other Perms, for their own reasons, avoided Anthemusa the entire month of August. In April, when they had all arrived, the beach was like a long-lost lover rediscovered for the perennials, a new lover to be indulged in insatiably for the first-timers, and the compensation for the torturous life in the village bars, taverns and shops for all. In April it was easy to believe that the beach was exclusively theirs, with its expanse of newly combed sand and a few scattered groups of friends close enough for smiles and waves to be exchanged, but too far for conversations to be overheard. Glorious space and the rugged blue of the sea, still cool from the winter, clear and refreshing, crashing her waves exuberantly on the hesitant toes of those who asked permission before they entered her.

But as the number of tourists steadily increased, the affair between the sea and the Perms waned, until love turned to hate. It became clear to them as the time passed

that she would have anyone, and when permission was not granted, the intruders from other lands would take her by force, soiling her with their oiled bodies, leaving their wastes floating inside her until she became feverish and nauseated, throwing up garbage onto the shore. And who needed the mayhem, the drunken Germans and the histrionic Swedes, whose excuse for their round-the-clock obnoxiousness was that in their country booze cost too much to get so stupid. There were distant beaches the Perms could go to in August if they had the energy or they'd wait to go back to Anthemusa when September eventually rolled around. "Oh September, please come earlier this year," was the lament heard all over Nysas by those forced to stay. Even *Agia Irini's* bells seemed to sing this song, as they chimed from the highest point of the island, sometimes sadly, sometimes as a direct command at all hours of the day and night.

"God has gone to another island for some peace and quiet," Father Theodoros once told Ketí in response to her query about the indiscriminate bell-ringing. "I'm calling him back to save us. You never know when he might be listening."

September came when September was good and ready, when hot, sticky August tired of its tricks. It took the exact same number of days every year for the heat to subside, for the gods to come back rested and relieved, for the Augustines to board the ferry, sunburnt and delirious, and for relative peace to return.

Ariadne, heeding the advice of those more experienced than she, has taken to hiding out in the village on these endless August afternoons. The "No Problem" runs repeats of Monty Python films for its British patrons, The Blues Brothers for the Yanks. If Alikí is not working the bar, Ariadne slips into the cool darkness of the near-empty pub to watch a fragment of whatever is up on the screen that day—never the whole thing. Other days she visits the shop owners she has become friendly with to dream out loud about what they will all do when the season ends, though some of them can't see past August. "Let cruel August leave us behind, and should we be so lucky to survive, that will be reason enough to celebrate."

Most days Ariadne just holes up in her room, her door locked, the shutters closed, waiting for the obstinate August sun to begin its retreat. She lies there between her cool white sheets thinking of everything and nothing . Like everyone else, Anthemusa holds little interest for her now. But unlike her co-workers who feel betrayed, or indifferent to the beach's many charms, Ariadne has simply become bored of Anthemusa—atmospheric ennui, familiarity breeding contempt.

"Is there a beach here?" Ariadne responds to the Augustines who pack the Scat Club when they mention that they have never seen her there. They laugh heartily at her act; what a joker this purveyor of Orgasms is. But Ariadne isn't joking, she has truly forgotten. Just as she's ceased noticing the view from her balcony, that famous view which she has used countless times to lure her quarry to her room.

"You've got to come up and see the moon from my balcony some time," she announces coquettishly, then smiles. And though there is indeed an ulterior motive involved in the invitation that has nothing to do with the moon in the sky, she does believe in the beauty of the view. She presents it to the lucky observer like a gift, something from Nysas to take away with him that could have never been imagined otherwise. Many of Ariadne's brief love affairs have begun on that balcony under the sea of squinting stars, looking out over the bay where the phosphorescent moon beams its velvety light onto the black water. They listen to the sound of waves crashing up against rocks, watch the mountains huddling around the beam of moonlight like Titans scrying their future. An arm slips around Ariadne's waist, lips brush the back of her neck and the lover *du nuit* turns her away from the magnificent view to give her a slow, meaningful kiss. Ariadne then leads him into her chamber with the solemnity of a priestess leading the chosen one to the sacrificial mound. He has seen the wonder and will now have to die. The view is forgotten as quickly by the man as Ariadne forgets the victim.

Though the view is still there in August, unchanged and serene, Ariadne has not looked at it for weeks, oblivious of its presence. As oblivious as she is to the mementos her lovers leave behind, the T-shirts, the crumpled pieces of paper bearing addresses—which she uses to light the lantern hanging outside her door—the bracelets, amulets and bones lying under her bed, rotting, disintegrating, collecting dust.

Why then, given her state of amnesia and her August apathy, has Ariadne climbed aboard the bus to the beach with the hated Augustines, her nose stuck out the window breathing in dust and exhaust fumes to avoid the reek of the animals inside? She has not brought a towel or a beach mat with her, and even if bathing suits were *de rigueur*, which they are not, she would not have bothered to wear one. Her purpose is specific on this scorched afternoon. It is rumoured that there is a tattoo artist on the beach, though the word artist is to be applied with caution. First a tiny Pegasus appeared on the butt of one of the Perms, a Daliesque rose on the belly of another, a dolphin diving into the cleavage of a third. Soon many more Perms (and a number of rat-assed tourists) were being branded by this tattooist who, according to rumour, learned his trade in jail.

Ariadne decided that morning that a marking was in order, an outer scar that revealed the holocaust within. She's not really sure what the symbol should be, but it has to be something intrinsic to her nature, something that will not allow for questions, that will signal the gropers and the interlopers—before they approach—of the burden she bears.

The crowd carries Ariadne off the bus in a wave of motion, pouring out onto the sand, which absorbs it immediately. Ariadne doesn't bother taking off her sandals. In August the sand is punishing hot, a thousand tiny needles rising skywards to draw blood. There are also the unwanted treasures buried like land mines, waiting for an ignorant and intrepid foot. Loosening herself from the crowds, Ariadne walks away

from the sea, not even deigning to look in its direction, turning her eyes away from it as if it were a dead dog on the side of the road, though she is still buffeted by its stench. She cuts a swath in the sand behind the Way Out Cafe, and walks into the campsite where the tattooist is said to have pitched a tent. She immediately sees a man with web-like, blue-green skin carving into a woman's back.

Ariadne approaches cautiously because she doesn't know the etiquette. Is this branding a private ritual, as intimate as sex, to be performed with consent between the tattooist and his subject? Is she interrupting? As she ponders this, sand creeping into her sandals, the woman looks up at Ariadne.

"Yeah, what do you want?"

Ariadne explains to the woman that her friend with the Pegasus-adorned- butt sent her. That she too wants to be marked. The tattooist, absorbed in his work, does not look up at her, but continues to move the buzzing needle around steadily, smudging away droplets of blood with his thumb.

The woman's limbs and torso are covered in tattoos, indiscriminately, with no obvious plan or theme. Some are successful, others are awkward and ugly, like a child's crayon drawing, the colours running out from the sides. There is a butterfly on the woman's thigh, one wing bigger than the other—crippled, Ariadne thinks, unable to fly. There is a yin/yang symbol on her upper arm, though it is shaped more like an egg than a circle, ready to hatch a black and white Buddha from its crooked split down the center. There are the signs of the zodiac, eight of the twelve, scattered over the woman's shoulders, chest and arms: a ram on her left breast, a scorpion eating its own tail on her right, the scales of justice on her left shoulder, and two fish circling a set of twins like sharks on her right bicep. The woman is the tattooist's sketch pad, his *tabula rasa*, and his progress can be tracked along her body, from stick figure to multicoloured, patchy heart. The tattooist himself is similarly decorated with various scribbles, and a few

have obviously aggravated him enough to tattoo an X over them, recording his displeasure on his skin forever.

When he finally looks up from his work in progress—a mermaid with Poseidon's trident and a massive, scaly dick—he looks Ariadne over and scowls. "You look like a screamer."

Ariadne studies him, his missing front teeth, his ink-stained fingers with dirty nails that scratch his stubbly chin. "Don't worry," she replies coolly, "they all wish I'd scream."

"So what'll it be?" He dips the needle into a murky solution, then tests its tip with his blackened thumb. "It's starting to get dull," he says to the sketch pad.

"I thought you might have some samples." She stares into the tattooist's eyes to show him that he doesn't scare her. The sketch pad gets up and pirouettes around Ariadne, showing off her tattoos like a revolving display case. "Got anything else?" Ariadne asks carefully. "Not that I don't like yours, miss, but I want it to say something about me."

The tattooist throws her a few sheets covered with simple line drawings. Ariadne notices that many of them already appear on him or the sketch pad in varying degrees of finesse. She looks through the sheets slowly, trying to determine if any of them, once divorced from the pock-marked skin of the tattooist and his gangly girlfriend, will speak to her, jump onto her flesh of their own accord. She feels their eyes on her, and when she looks up from the sheets of paper, she sees that they are staring her down, looking her over as if she were nothing more than lunch that in due time they will butcher, then devour.

"I'm sorry it's taking me so long to decide," she says, breaking the tense silence and flipping through the drawings one more time. Somewhere on the beach beer bottles are being smashed in a duel. "I mean, I'm going to have it for a long time, so I want to be sure. You know what I mean?" She attempts a smile.

The tattooist rolls his eyes towards the sky until nothing but white stares back at Ariadne from his sockets. She looks away. "Everyone," he says sardonically, "comes down here and gives me this crap about how they're going to have the thing for the rest of their lives. You never know. You could die tomorrow."

The sketch pad laughs, revealing more of her rotting teeth. The tattooist laughs too, as if this is an old, private joke between them. Only Ariadne isn't laughing. She is not going to let them faze her. She has come to be marked, and Hera help her, she is not going to leave until it happens. She wants people to know. To see it coming.

"You're a very pleasant fellow," she replies sarcastically, "but I'm here to do business, not to make friends. I'll take this one." She tosses him a drawing of a coiled snake. "I want it around my bicep, as if it's slithering up to bite my throat. Do you think you can manage that?"

He lifts her arm and studies it, sticking his head into her arm pit and taking a snort. "For you, two thousand drachmas—with no colours." He takes another snort and savours it and the sketch pad laughs. Ariadne yanks her arm away.

"No colours," she agrees and places two thousand drachmas on top of the pile of sketches as she had once before on the unshuffled tarot cards of a chain-smoking gypsy who was about to read her fortune. The sketch pad snatches the bills, rolls them up into a tight tube, then slides them between the ram and the scorpion.

"Spend it fast," Ariadne quips. "You could die tomorrow."

"Don't worry," the sketch pad smiles. "It's already spent."

The needle firing points of greenish-black ink into her skin doesn't hurt as much as she expected it to, no worse than the hot sand on the soles of her feet. It feels more like a persistent scratching, a gnawing away of skin, than a pricking. She thinks back to the horror of Yannis' needles, and now sees that she'd over-reacted. The only time she feels the dull point pushing into her is when the tattooist slows down to negotiate a

curve in the snake's back. The sketch pad sits before Ariadne during the whole procedure staring into her eyes to see if she will cringe.

"Does it hurt?" she asks hopefully every few minutes, and no matter how slow those curves are (was he slowing down on purpose?) Ariadne keeps a straight face, bracing herself against the pain, not wanting to give the other woman the satisfaction.

When it is done, the finished snake is crude and simple like a petroglyph, but the tattooist is pleased with himself, and the sketch pad wants one too and offers him her ankle.

"The ankle hurts the most, you know," she tells Ariadne, her eyes shining expectantly. "All that bone."

Ariadne likes the snake, too. The way it wraps around her arm twice, its head shooting up towards her shoulder like an arrow, its tail undulating towards her elbow. For all its crudeness, it is inspired and graceful, as if some invisible force entered the tattooist's shaky hand to guide the serpent's birth. She touches the coils and she feels the sting of raw flesh. A few drops of blood escape from its body.

"Feels good, doesn't it?" the sketch pad asks.

"Feels great," Ariadne replies, running her finger along the edges. "Like it's alive."

"You know, you're all right." The sketch pad comes closer, raising her hand as if to slap Ariadne's raw arm. Ariadne looks at her without flinching and the other woman backs off. "Yeah, not at all *xeneroti* like I first thought. Where do you come from?"

"Nowhere," Ariadne replies, then walks away.

Ariadne rides the bus back up to the village, this time empty except for a severely sunburnt Iclander, practically unconscious and moaning piteously, his skin a painful shade of purple. She strokes the snake as if it were a pet and takes pleasure in the burning sensations that travel from her arm into the rest of her body. This pain is her own, she asked for it herself. She is proud of it. Like a permanent bruise, the snake will

always remind her of her capacity for suffering. At the same time, like a homeopathic cure, it will protect her, repel other vipers who mistake her for prey. Like killing like. She is marked now, spoken for. Momentarily she feels strong again, invincible, transformed by the snake she will wear on her arm until she dies (tomorrow or whenever), that speaks of how much she has already survived. She can even survive August now, she thinks, and its implacable pestilence. The snake will swallow them all.

39.

Love is narcissistic, every lover looking for a mirror image, a clone of him or her self—minus the faults—in the radiant, all-forgiving eyes of the loved one. A new and improved "I" with the appropriate genitals, either matching or opposite depending on genetics or childhood trauma.

Many of Nysas' visitors—the young, the single, the beautiful and the not so beautiful—hope to find that perfect other during their stay, at least temporarily. They expect to immediately recognize him, her, or "it" in the case of the donkey-fucking Swede—to be struck by lightning while floating in the sea.

Julian comes to Nysas in August on the recommendation of a friend who has assured him that he will find everything he is looking for on this particular island, all the things that suit his particular temperament. When Julian gets off the 2 p.m. ferry, he looks up at the village through the billowing heat, then towards the bus teeming with the same smelly, loathsome drunks he endured on the ten hour trip from Piraeus, and decides that despite the heat and lingering nausea from the crossing, he will walk up the hill.

He starts up the donkey track with his travel bag slung over his shoulder, the strap cutting off circulation in his arm, and its weight pitching him slightly to the right. He steps over steaming piles of dung for the first few metres in the same gingerly manner

he avoided the back-breaking cracks of his childhood. But the moment he turns his eyes up from the ground, his foot lands right on a patty that explodes around his leather sneaker, *squoosh*.

"Fuck." He paws the ground with his offended foot, then scrapes the brown ooze that clings to the sides of his shoe on a white wall. A donkey tethered just beyond the wall laughs at him as if a practical joke it set up hours ago has finally paid off. It lifts its head towards the sky and guffaws. (*There are very few light-hearted moments in a donkey's life.*) Julian stares at the beast and imagines vivisectioning it, its blood running all the way down the winding donkey track into the port and staining the sea like wine. The donkey stops laughing as if it understands the implications of the stare. It emits a snort of apology.

"That's better," says Julian, then decides that the apologetic donkey might be of some use. He walks behind the white wall to where the donkey is tethered and the animal shrinks back, its ears folded against its head, its nose buried between its front legs. Julian reaches for the thick, grey rope which keeps the beast in bondage and quickly loosens it, looking around to see if anyone is watching his donkey-jacking, a crime punishable by a severe browbeating by the village priest, though Julian does not know this. (Nysas' youths often pull this prank to impress girls, taking them on joyrides to the far end of the island where underdeveloped breasts and over-anxious cocks can be groped in private. "Do you want to go to hell?" Father Theodoros admonishes the sinners each and every time.)

"You'll find your way back, won't you, Silver?" Julian mounts his steed using a short wall as a boost. The donkey has no saddle and the slow, stumbling ride up the hill makes Julian ponder the possibility of future heirs, until he feels himself stiffening and is reassured that the family jewels are diamond hard and indestructible.

The donkey drops a steady stream of shit as he and Julian climb closer and closer to the village, spied upon through brittle lace curtains by grannies clicking their

tongues like clocks, crowed at by blind roosters with no sense of time. At the top of the hill Julian dismounts and turns the donkey around. He slaps its fly-swarmed rump, pushing it in the direction from which it came, but the animal seems confused, refusing to budge. Later, the donkey will receive a severe whipping from its fig-picking owner, who was deep in siesta when the ungrateful beast ran away.

Julian walks through the gates of the village, past the SnakeSkin and around the corner towards the Scat Club. The doors to the bar are closed, but music blares through its windows, the only sound breaking the siesta silence of the empty square, calling to no one since all the tourists are still at the beach. Julian's face screws up when he walks past the bar's windows. He abhors jazz. He quickens his pace and decides that a room as far away as possible from the free-floating screams of the saxophone, the hung-back, a-rhythmic whispering of the drums (*ca-ja-jink, ca-ca-ja-jink*) will probably make his stay more pleasant. He turns up the path next to the bank and is ambushed by several old women in kerchiefs and flowered, baggy dresses who cry out, "*Room, room, room,*" like hyperactive children playing with toy cars. They wave him over and gesture towards their dark huts, but he can still hear the music, so he shakes his head no.

He reaches a plateau and follows the path, walking past the cheese room where he hears someone singing in the shower and sees a squat, dark-haired man with a lined and sunburnt face standing outside on the stoop, looking at nothing in particular and whistling. The man nods at Julian and Julian nods back.

A few doors away from the cheese room, an old woman, a carbon copy of the others, approaches him and holds out a bowl of fresh, ripe figs. "*Paré ena , pedi mou.*" Take one, my son. Julian peels back the smooth, green skin and bites into the cool, pulpy body of the fruit. He takes a deep breath as he chews and realizes, as he is standing there, that he can no longer hear the loathsome music. As if reading his mind, the old woman smiles, holds out the bowl for him to take another piece of fruit, and tentatively pronounces, "Room?" Julian nods gratefully and follows her into her tiny house, through

a dark, primitive kitchen, and into a small room behind it. The room has one window, the size of a picture postcard, that looks out onto a wall; a metal bed frame with a thin, single mattress; and a huge crucifix, half the size of the wall, hanging above the bed, placed there by the old woman to guilt the young people she lodges out of illicit acts.

"Toilet?" Julian asks, trying to use his hands to indicate what he wants, but realizing that he is bereft of any sign language that doesn't involve pointing at his crotch. He folds his hands behind his back. The old lady, understanding, takes his hand and leads him out of the kitchen and around the back where a small metal structure has been erected behind the house, directly in front of Julian's postcard window. The room smells faintly of old piss and Julian notices a dozen plastic bottles filled with water, neatly arranged around the toilet for those hours of the day, as he will soon discover, when the island's meager water supply is turned off. The shower runs onto the cement floor and is no more than a trickle of cold water. Apart from the unavoidable smell, the bathroom is spotless, and Julian decides the smell can be lived with while the old gal is demonstrating the use of the bottles, tilting one towards the toilet bowl without spilling a drop.

After the demonstration, the old woman leads him back to his room and gives him one large, rusted key. She then introduces herself, pointing at her chest. "Kyria Marigoula," she pronounces slowly, then turns her finger towards him. She repeats his name out loud, pronouncing it, "*Tzoolian*." Julian smiles, then pulls some bills out of his pocket. "Drachmas?" he asks. "Twohundredfifty," she announces proudly, happy that the words she's rehearsed so diligently have been delivered properly. He hands her two thousand drachmas and holds up eight fingers. "Eight nights," he says slowly, in that way people confronted with a language block do. But Kyria Marigoula reads fingers; she takes the two thousand drachmas and stuffs them into a pocket in her apron. She is proud of herself, she feels cunning and sly—*poniri*—an attitude considered by the Greeks

to be of their own invention, an innate character trait that gives them the edge on the rest of the world.

Kyria Marigoula knows very well that the going rate for a bed on Nysas this season is 200 drachmas. Her friends down the path have been renting out their spare rooms since April and now, during high season, even sell their marital beds to the tourists, sleeping instead on cots in their back yards or fields with their chickens and donkeys, grateful for the night's coolness. Kyria Marigoula is a widow with nobody to take care of her since the Lord didn't give her any sons, just one daughter, married and in Athens. Dora sends her mother a small allowance that never lasts long enough. An extra fifty drachmas is nothing to these foreigners, Kyria Marigoula justifies to herself, firmly and resolutely, though deep down she feels slightly guilty. To allay those feelings of guilt, she shares whatever she has with her temporary children—which is what she considers her guests to be. She doesn't want to risk angering any of the gods, old or new, with her greed.

Julian has chosen well. Every morning when he gets up he will find a basket at his door. On some days it will be filled with fresh fruit: oranges, grapes and figs. Other days it will bear hot bread from Kyria Marigoula's oven and chunks of goat's cheese. Kyria Marigoula is friends with Kyr Georgis and trades her bread for his cheese. It is the mornings when the basket is filled with small, oval biscuits sprinkled with powdered sugar or honey and nuts when Julian will feel luckiest. Kyria Marigoula is famous in the village for her cookies—blessed hands the other women say. She sells boxes of the cookies around town for a few drachmas to supplement her income, angering the baker whose own sugared cookies sit in the shop window going stale, attracting flies. Thank God for the tourists, the baker thinks.

On that first day on Nysas, after closing his door on Kyria Marigoula's sweet-smelling kitchen, Julian sleeps off his nausea and his travel weariness. He murmurs in his sleep as he dreams of spreading suntan lotion on the backs of pretty young girls. When

he wakes up from his nap, it is dark in his room and panic rises in his throat. For a moment, in the dark, he completely forgets where he is, until the moon's thin light reflecting off the bathroom wall finds its way into the room through the tiny window and shines on his travel bag and his shoes by the door. He gets up and makes his way through the kitchen, stopping a moment to look at the small shrine of Virgins and Saints illuminated by a flickering votive candle, set up in a corner above the stove. He raises a thumb at the icons, not knowing what else to do, then tip-toes into the back yard towards the bathroom, half expecting his hostess to jump out from behind a wall or a shrub. Kyria Marigoula is nowhere to be seen, though she has left him a set of thin, frayed towels hanging from the bathroom door.

Julian slips out of his rumpled clothing, steps under the rusted shower head and screams. He forgot about the water, burning cold against his hot, sleepy skin. Just like diving into an icy lake in the Rockies after a day of hiking, he thinks as the shock of the cold wears off. Julian is from Canada. This is his first trip abroad.

Now fully awake, he dresses for his first night out on the town. He plucks his favourite shirt out of his travel bag—long-sleeved and made of crushed, red velvet—which he's found no opportunity to wear on his travels until now. He pulls on a pair of black jeans and his boots, straightens the beaded choker that turned while he slept, slicks back his black, curly hair with a dab of gel, then throws himself into the fray. As he walks past the cheese room, down that path that runs next to the bank, he begins to hear music, but this time it isn't jazz. A cacophony of sounds rises above the village and into the firmament, imitating a radio stuck between frequencies: a fuzzy melange of music, laughter and shouting in strange and varied languages. He bypasses the Scat Club, already full, and heads towards the center of the village, where he finds this afternoon's deserted square now swarming with people like a painting come to life, bursting with colours and movement.

Julian is immediately swept away in the waves of people. He is only seen again when he comes up for air long enough to imbibe magic elixirs in bars, or to shake the water out of his black curls as he dances above the surf, flinging his head back and forth as if to shake off the thing that binds him, like the donkey to the wall, like mortals to the earth.

He crawls back home to Kyria Marigoula's on his hands and knees, past the bank, past the cheese room, where Karina and Petros laugh at him as he inches past them, an empty bottle of retsina in his hand guiding him like a cane. Ariadne is not home yet. She is still on her knees painting the floor or she might have laughed, too. When she arrives a while later, she doesn't find the story funny in the re-telling. One drunk more or less, she says, is not a thing she wants to think about when she gets home.

Julian finds his little room with some difficulty along the dark, narrow path. Luckily, Kyria Marigoula is still up kneading her cookie dough for a morning delivery to *Agia Irini*. She finds Julian wandering around lost outside and, sniffing him out like a mother cat, picks him up by the scruff and puts him to bed. Julian is asleep before his head hits his pillow, and Kyria Marigoula places a glass of water on his nightstand along with two huge aspirins, the kind that have to be dissolved in liquid, then gulped down bitterly in one shot.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk, *Tzoolian*." She clicks her tongue and brushes his hair out of his eyes, but her tone is soft, like that of an indulgent mother. She wishes again that the gods had seen fit to give her a son. A son never left his mother all alone. You could forgive everything for the love of a son. She lights a votive candle and leaves it in Julian's room. She closes the door quietly and digs her hands deep into the cookie dough, kneading her sorrows into the sweetness.

What he does on the second night, this surrogate son of hers, Kyria Marigoula finds harder to forgive. She is stretched out on the divan in the parlour off the kitchen,

resting while the cookie dough rises, when she hears the voices. Julian's, then the girls'—not one, but two.

"*Christos ke Panagia!*" Kyria Marigoula crosses herself and shoots off the divan like a crusader called into action. Not in her house this type of shamelessness. She pounds on the door to Julian's room until the kitchen shakes, pots and pans clanking against the walls, dishes trembling in stacks like castanets.

"*Tzoolian!*" she bellows. "*Tzoolian! Anixe tyn porta!—Open the door!—Tzoolian!*"

The giggling behind the door subsides and Kyria Marigoula hears Julian's footsteps approaching. When he opens the door he is confronted with the angry, swollen face of his hostess, her eyes blazing with holy fire trained directly on the two skinny blonde women, half undressed and motionless, hoping their lack of movement will render them invisible.

"*Oh!*—No!" she screams into the room, swiping her arm with its extended forefinger back and forth like a wiper across Julian's startled windshield of a face. Then, "*Oh!*" even louder, then louder still.

The girls spring to life, grabbing their clothes and running out the door past the colossus with her heaving chest before anything drastic happens. Upon their return to Denmark or France, or wherever the two frisky creatures hail from, they will inform their friends that Greece is magnificent as long as you avoid all contact with Greeks.

After the girls make their escape, leaving Julian's anticipated nocturnal festivities unfulfilled and Kyria Marigoula's full frontal attack satisfied, the adversaries stare at each other unapologetically for a few minutes until Julian, realizing he can't win the battle, mumbles goodnight, *kalinihta*, and shuts the door in his hostess' face.

"*Kalinihta*," Kyria Marigoula calls through the closed door, finding a spark of forgiveness in her heart for the boy. Since she's had the advantage of winning the standoff, she is willing to be magnanimous. But he still must be punished, she thinks, as

she stares at the closed door, listening to Julian shuffling around the room, dropping one shoe then the other on the floor before crawling into the creaky bed alone.

She goes back to work, rolling out the night's cookies with fervor, turning out a better batch than even her former best. But in the morning when Julian awakes, there is no basket at his door.

40.

Julian tiptoes through the kitchen, hoping to avoid an early morning confrontation with Kyria Marigoula. He considers not using the bathroom at all, letting the cool morning sea wash away the night's accumulation of dust, oil and sweat. Maybe it had been premature of him to pay for his entire stay in advance. If he leaves his things in his room all day, when he returns from the beach will they still be there, or will he find them piled outside the house on the stoop, being slowly carried away by passersby on their way down the path? He's seen it happen to others in the short time he's been here. How is he to conquer Europe if he can't bring anyone home with him? He'll have to sweet talk the old dame, though talking is definitely not an option. That is too bad, because he is preternaturally good at sweet talk. Maybe a gift of some sort might work, a bribe for her to turn a blind eye. It is just his luck to have rented a room from a night stalker, a Cyclops puttering around her kitchen while all of Nysas' other crones snoozed happily and deeply, the sounds of the nightly carousing and gamboling throughout the village drowned out by their thunderous snoring.

Julian slips into the bathroom unnoticed. He has weighed the options and considered a confrontation with Kyria Marigoula less offensive than a walk through the square with a hairy tongue and crud in his eyes. He stands under the showerhead and lets the cold trickle dig into him like Chinese water torture, rinses his mouth out with bottled water and makes his way to the cheese pie shop he discovered on his first

morning on the island. Kyria Vasso, the rotund woman who runs the small shop on the square, greets him as if she's known him for a lifetime and asks him in broken English what he'd like this morning. Julian points to a cup of yogurt covered in chopped walnuts and shiny with a generous swirl of Nysas' golden honey. "And a cheese pie, please." He points at the only triangle left in the glass case.

"So sorry," the woman shrugs, "this *tyropita* is for Ariadne. She no come yet today. Soon. Spinach, potato, yes?" She points to other shapes in the display case.

Julian shakes his head no, miffed at not getting his way and unable to be courteous about it this early in the morning. He eats his yogurt quickly, gulps a cup of instant coffee like unpleasant though necessary medicine, and hops on the bus to Anthemusa where he looks for his two companions from the night before, but doesn't find them. "No matter," he says to no one in particular. "Plenty more where they came from." And he is right. On that indistinguishable sunny day he meets others and knows enough to take them outside, up against the smooth whitewashed walls of hunchbacked churches bathed in moonlight, a moonlight so bright that it rivals the sun's revelation, illuminating the nooks and crannies of the village, unveiling the temporary lovers hidden within them.

He is not good with names, so he commits the nocturnal nymphs to memory according to country of origin, preferring France to Italy, Denmark to Spain. He collects their addresses, but only when they are offered—Julian never asks. He was thinking of passing through Nice, or Firenze, or Leeds, he might mention while tickling the *belle du jour*'s ear with his tongue, and an invitation follows more often than not. Some of the young women allude to live-in boyfriends who might not be so welcoming of the Canadian traveller, but promise to set him up in the house of a friend close by where they can visit him often while the poor sap of a boyfriend is at work or watching football. Others assure Julian he can stay for as long as he likes, and they dangle job possibilities before him: he can teach English or paint a great aunt's villa. In one case

there is an immediate opening, a position perfect for Julian's talents in the lass's too big bed. One even offers to marry him so he can stay with her indefinitely, and he laughs uncontrollably until the embarrassed girl starts to cry. He apologizes, kisses away her tears and promises to write. That type of address is immediately tossed. He has no desire to entangle himself in the sticky web of a good Irish-Catholic girl. Julian's conquests on Nysas soon become a nameless, faceless blur of thrusting hips and lips cracked from the sun. The girls remind him of American nowhere towns he's zipped past on the highway: a miasma of sameness, a landscape he knows he's passed through, but which has no landmarks or road signs to remember it by.

He imagines landing in the airport or railway station of a homogenous country and not being able to pick the girl out of the crowd of faces, all uniformly Spanish or Swedish, all dark-haired or light-haired, all beaming anxiously at the arrival gate. When a girl finally emerges from the sea of faces to lead him away, will his fondest hopes that she was someone else in the crowded terminal be dashed? Will there be another girl there, prettier and more endowed with the ideal attributes of her race, who he mistook for her? As the anonymous girl kisses him and squeezes his hands in welcome, will he suddenly remember her name, he wonders, or will he have to reach into his pocket for the crumpled piece of paper she gave him on Nysas, just to make sure he knows who she is?

The only name that sticks in his head is Ariadne, cheese-pie-reserver, depriver of his morning craving. He asks Kyria Vasso if she can reserve one of the delicacies for him as well, the triangle of crusty filo pastry filled with egg, milk and Kyr Georgis' goat cheese. For the rest of his stay the display case holds two cheese pies waiting to be devoured. Julian always eats his first while Ariadne completes her morning preparations at the Scat Club, the blaring music assaulting her tender consciousness as she refills the bottles with colour-coded hooch guaranteed to rust the intestines, to rot the brain. By the time Ariadne makes it to Kyria Vasso's for her cheese pie and a tall

glass of cassis extract mixed with water and a few cubes of ice, Julian is already on the beach looking around for a suitable companion for the evening; someone to spend a few hours with who will carry him over to the next patch where he is happy to be alone.

Julian, in truth, is most happy alone. He sometimes wishes for someone to play with, but no one has ever fully agreed to his rules and after a few hours, or weeks or months it becomes obvious to him that no game to his liking is possible. He doesn't want to compromise on anything so fundamental as the way his life should be played, so he changes playmates often. In this sense, Nysas is a perfect venue for him though, perhaps, even more disheartening. Without fail, after a few hours under the intense scrutiny of the sun or the moon, it is always obvious to him that the illusion of possible love can not be sustained, and the distraction wears off as soon as the playmate reveals her real self, open-mouthed and splay-legged, crying out in ecstasy to various regional gods: Oh Thor! Oh Neptune! Oh Enkidu!

To most observers this might seem like a cruel and typical way for a man to get his rocks off and then move on to newer, untried shores. But in his heart Julian is looking for that eternal playmate, that partner in crime who will forever relieve him of the search. Finding her requires diligence, sacrifice, effort and a mind open to all possibilities, variations and ethnicities. This is how he justifies the daily turnover of pretty young things from around the world. It is work, momentarily satisfying, ultimately disappointing.

Julian knows what he is looking for and feels he will know his soulmate when she crosses his path. It will be like looking into the mirror in the morning and rediscovering that you are alive, rejoicing at your being after sleep's small death. In the meanwhile he keeps trying, tickling, tasting, hopping from bar to bar on Nysas, pressing up against anonymous bodies who purr, "I love you," in dark alleyways because they want to believe it. He never brings another one home, fearing the wrath of his hostess, who grew in girth and height into an enraged Hera that first night, which now seems so long ago. In

a way, he has to admit, he is thankful for the restriction. It saves him from the morning's rudeness when the light of day confirms that last night's *belle* (or *bella*) is this morning's ugly stepsister. No matter how beautiful she is in her own right, Julian's scorn is always the same.

Kyria Marigoula, for her part, continues to bake her cookies late into the night, keeping a close watch on the comings and goings of her surrogate son. And though he still comes back too late for her liking, and always a little too drunk, he comes home alone and that is enough for her. The baskets of fruit and cookies reappear like foundlings at his door every morning. The boy is so skinny it is her duty to fatten him up while he is under her roof. He brings out the mother in her, long since buried with her sea-faring husband and her forgotten daughter. The precious boy even brought her some wild flowers the day after "the incident," ugly things that make her sneeze. She keeps them in the parlour anyway, next to the faded divan where she rests while the cookie dough rises, and every time she raises her cotton hankie to her bulbous nose it is Julian she blesses.

41.

After completing the rounds of his usual bars (for it is not hard to foment a habit on Nysas, even after only a few days), Julian makes his way home, with no pit stops in alleyways. Tonight he wants to be alone. As he walks through the square, snagging his mesh shirt on one of the rush-bottomed chairs stacked upside down on tables, tripping over the brooms of cleaners sweeping away broken glass and other detritus, crashing into newly-joined couples staggering towards their rooms holding onto each other as much out of the need to keep their balance as out of lust, Julian decides that perhaps he had stayed on Nysas too long. It's been a toss-up in the last day or so whether he should linger past the original eight days (which end at 2 p.m. tomorrow), when he will

transmogrify into a creature somewhere between a hated tourist and a Perm. He likes it here for the most part and can see himself indulging indefinitely in all Nysas has to offer. But tonight his mood has shifted. He feels somber and cynical, a little depressed. A scratch has appeared in the flawless veneer worn both by him and the island. And once he's noticed the scratch, it is hard for him to keep on behaving as if he's landed in paradise.

Earlier in the evening Julian found himself sitting alone in the Elysian Fields, the gigantic outdoor dance club on the outskirts of the village. As he sucked back his final salt-watery scotch, a song he felt the need to move his body to came on. It was a tune by the Smiths, the band that whined for his generation, and perhaps it was the sentiment expressed in the lyrics that had set him off.

*So what difference does it make?
What difference does it make
It makes none
But now you have gone
And you must be looking very old tonight.*

And he did feel old tonight. And tired. Tired of being on all the time, charming and witty. Tired of the empty one nighters with girls young and stupid enough to believe that a few moments of the old in-out in an alleyway led to everlasting love. Tired of prancing around like a satyr on acid, keeping everyone amused, keeping the party going. He wanted to walk lead-footed and heavy-hearted through the square, head hung low, shoulders hunched, and to have someone still love him.

He looked at the twirling, drunken idiots falling all around him on the dance floor and sat down before the song was over. He forced the last drop of whiskey down his throat and was about to make his exit when a young woman wearing a fishnet dress and nothing underneath walked up to him. "Where are you from," she asked flirtatiously, resorting to the most over-used opening line on Nysas, but employing it as confidently as

if she had made it up herself. Or perhaps she believed that the fishnet dress would distract from her lack of imagination.

Julian, silent for a moment, looked her over casually "You don't care where I'm from," he finally replied, staring past her perkiness at the door. "And if I don't tell you where I'm from, I'm sure you won't lose any sleep over it tonight."

The would-be seductress stood there for an instant, baffled, the flesh visible through her dress overcome by goosebumps in reaction to Julian's frosty response. She walked back to the table by the dance floor where her giggling girlfriends, who had watched the whole exchange, sat. She lied to them when they asked her what he'd said. She took a sip of her warm, pink cocktail and told them that Julian didn't speak English.

Having finally escaped the Elysian Fields, Julian barrelled through town, head hung low, shoulders hunched, a scowl wrinkling his face. "If anyone's going to love me," he called out, "love me now, like this, when I hate the world." No one took up his offer. This was the island of love, not hate. Those who hated, who dared to be anything less than giddy and gay were ostracized, ignored until they questioned whether they even existed. If no one ever looked at you, how would you know you were visible, something more than a shade, the wretches desperately asked the mirror, which never replied. Maybe there was another island somewhere where brooding was the law, where the stupidly happy were banished to underground caves and battered day and night with the echo of their own uncontrolled mirth until they died laughing along with it. This thought made Julian smile, despite himself.

Julian continues towards Kyria Marigoula's house, past the darkened windows of bars closed for the night. The bars look squalid and pathetic once their lights are extinguished, and Julian decides that yes, tomorrow he will go. The other who would mirror him is apparently not here. Why would his soulmate waste her time amongst these buffoons anyway? If she'd come here at all, she probably left immediately. His

logic has been flawed from the outset. Despite what his father has often told him, you can seldom find diamonds once they've fallen into lumps of shit. Let that old fucker scrape shit out from under his cracked fingernails; Julian isn't interested in digging. This should have occurred to him on his first day as he climbed the donkey track. But maybe, he admits, he came looking for shit. And having found it in abundance, it was time to go before the stench took permanent residence in his nostrils.

He would like one last drink, to put the night to rest, to celebrate his imminent departure. It is late though, and everything is closed but the sandwich shop, which doesn't serve anything but submarine sandwiches flattened in a waffle iron, their ambiguous sauces oozing out the sides. Maybe there's a stash of brandy, kept for medicinal purposes, behind the old lady's holy icons in the kitchen, he momentarily convinces and consoles himself as he marches past the bank. He learned that trick from his grandmother, who likes a nip now and then, but will never admit to it without a bang to her old chest and spit of phlegm into her embroidered hankie. He loves that old gal, and always encourages her to have another drink, for the good of her health, of course. As he reaches the outer limits of the square, he begins accepting that he might end up in his room, on this last night, sober.

When he reaches the Scat Club, he notices razor-thin sheets of light escaping through the cracks in the wooden doors. The music is turned off, which in Julian's estimation is a huge improvement, and his desire for one last drink resurges. He boldly pushes on the right upper panel of the four-panelled stable door, and as it swings open, a woman's voice spits, "We're closed," before he can even take in the layout of the only bar on Nysas he has never stepped into. Not one to be easily discouraged, he stands there for a moment, studying the Scat's interior, the cartoonish drawings on the walls, the types of bottles that line the shelves behind the bar in the inner room. It looks pretty much like all the other places on Nysas, except for the art and the woman (at least he thinks it's a woman) on her knees with her ass pointed towards him, painting her way

out the door. This strange creature on all fours doesn't even turn her head to acknowledge him as they exchange the first and last abrupt words they will ever speak to each other.

"Um, I saw the lights on," Julian ventures.

"But you didn't see the closed door," the woman snaps back.

"Could you sell me something to go?" he tries, proud of his quick thinking.

"What do you think this is, McDonald's?" She continues to paint in quick, practised strokes. Soon she will back right up against the door.

"Are you American?" he inquires, trying to make out her accent.

"No," she replies icily.

"What are you doing?"

"What does it look like I'm doing, I'm conducting a symphony." Every night the same dumb question. She rolls her eyes, though he can't see them.

"Do you paint every night?" Julian is suddenly intrigued by the brightness of the white circles, by the woman's even, sweeping strokes. One might even say he is mesmerized.

"Every night," she echoes. "Look can you just go away? I'm tired and we're closed."

"I can help," he offers playfully. "It looks like fun."

"Fun!" she shrieks as if stung by a hornet. "Fun is for you fucking tourists, for me this is work. Go roll yourself down the donkey track if you want fun, will you do that for me?" She turns around to cast the evil eye on him, but when she looks towards the voice, she sees no one there. Julian has not moved, he is still standing there staring, but when their eyes meet, the other simply disappears. She too seems to be faceless, the headless body of a decapitated servant whose ghost is condemned to repeat her last, hated task for all eternity.

Julian walks away from the Scat confused, never having gazed upon Ariadne's face. He walks past the cheese room, and Petros offers him a swig from a swiped bottle of brandy, which Julian accepts gratefully before walking home. "Stay, have another, mate," Petros calls out to him, but Julian shakes his head and enters the sweet smelling kitchen of Kyria Marigoula, who cries like a mother sending her only son off to war as he leaves the next afternoon, his knapsack stuffed with cookies for the long and dangerous journey ahead.

42.

It is a lie that until that last night, Ariadne and Julian never met. That they were never formally introduced, never shook hands, nor kissed on both cheeks in greeting is true, but they did meet like one foot path running into another, like a stream converging with a charging river, the former swept away in the latter's passion. Who represented the raging river and who the docile stream would be argued vehemently between themselves given the chance, but as it stands, their brief non-encounter where one disappeared in the other's gaze did not allow for such debate.

They crossed each other's path often in the eight days of Julian's stay, more often than any other two people on Nysas had in the same period of time. He left Kyria Vasso's cheese pie shop as Ariadne entered it. She crossed the square as Julian sat down for coffee. They edged past each other countless times on the narrow path in front of the bank that curved up towards the lane where they both lived. Their shoulders almost touched once or twice, sending a light electric current through their respective bodies, but when they turned to look for the source of the frisson, no one was there. Each blamed the resulting goosebumps on an itinerant sea breeze that was caught between the white buildings of the village and was trying to find its way home.

What, then, is this strange phenomenon that cloaked these two with invisibility, that allowed them to pass through each other entirely unnoticed? Some might hazard that Ariadne

was overtired, too preoccupied by her various gains and losses to notice Julian. Others might venture that Julian was not immediately attracted to Ariadne's type, preferring the breastless blonde water-sprites who washed up on Anthemusa from frigid northern shores, to the dark, shapely goddesses who emerged fully grown from the warm waters that surrounded the island. But these simple reasons aren't sufficient for the perplexity of the circumstance. The answer lies in the mirror, in the image reflected doubly in the dark discs of the other's eyes.

Julian spent eight days and eight nights squinting into the eyes of various women, trying to peer past their glassy surface and into the fecundity that lay beyond. His scrutiny was met with amusement by some, bemusement by others, and sometimes with outright paranoia. "I don't know what you want," a distraught damsel screamed, "but you're not going to find it here, so stop staring at me." Julian had known that immediately when all that looked back at him was his own squinting face swimming in her shocked blue irises. If the eyes, he thought, were the windows to the soul, all the windows he had passed on Nysas were nailed shut.

Ariadne has her own peculiar relationship with mirrors. There is a cracked, oval mirror with a carved wooden frame hanging in the Scat Club, in the small passageway between its two rooms. This threshold is where Ariadne stands guard on those rare occasions when there are no drinks to serve. She stares into the mirror's cracked surface in near hypnosis, which has earned her the reputation amongst the regulars of being vain. Though this, in part, may be true, Ariadne's love affair with the cracked mirror has a different root. She wants to see how the rest of the world experiences her countenance, what they see when she saunters down the street, when they look into her eyes. Ariadne stares and stares, trying to make herself a stranger, trying to forget that she knows the person staring back. She is attempting to produce a momentary split in her personality, to uncover another self with another name and a life different from the one she is trapped in. Sometimes she succeeds and, until she blinks again, a completely unknown face looks back at her from the glass. The face always disappears too fast for her to memorize, to recognize again were it to pass her on the street.

Julian and Ariadne passed each other like people abruptly confronted by their own reflection in a shop window. First there is a judgment, then the shock of recognition, followed by instant and complete amnesia of the moment. Since there is no other beyond the mirror image to grasp onto, the memory of the encounter disappears into thin air. Each person keeps walking down the street as if nothing has happened and the moment of self-discovery is erased from the brain like the events leading up to a near-fatal accident.

If Julian and Ariadne had been able to stand still for a moment, long enough to stare into each other's eyes until their features blurred, until their eyes became three and their noses turned topsy-turvy on their faces, then continue to stare until their features floated back to their proper places, they would find themselves looking at each other from inside—Julian from inside Ariadne and Ariadne from inside Julian. And in this mirror image they would both find exactly what they sought. If they could stand what they saw, they would immediately fall in love and never need to look into another mirror again. If they couldn't, they'd kill each other on the spot.

Most people don't like what looks back at them from the mirror every morning, that unkempt, surly creature, its face full of doubt and fear. They approach it warily, one eye shut tight. If only the creature were prettier or thinner or smarter looking, then everything would be fine, they could face the day with confidence.

Others never recognize the strange being who looks back at them questioningly so they create an image, a fantasy face somewhere between the stranger in the looking glass and the faceless observer. They abide by this face, putting it forth in the world, believing it to be their true self. Both Julian and Ariadne are part of this second group. Neither one knows what he or she really looks like, so upon encountering each other, they entered a state of oblivion. They kept wandering through a labyrinthine funhouse, following paths with dead ends blocked off by invisible glass walls. They stared into convex mirrors that horrifically distorted who they were; this they found easier to believe. And even if they happened to meet inside this maze, they would probably find themselves on opposite sides of the glass, unable to reach each other or to

touch, unable to confirm that this perfect other was real. They would turn their backs to each other, like disgruntled lovers in bed, and walk away feeling deprived of something they were not even sure really existed.

43.

Julian boards the boat to look for the brooding island, his spirits further darkened by the insistence of another bright and sunny day. Staring back at Nysas as it shrinks from his view, he can't help feeling that there was something hidden in its winding paths that he was supposed to find, but had completely missed. He looks over the side into the churning blue of the sea and thinks he can see his reflection warped in the waves. As he stares at his face it transforms into the face of a young woman looking up at him from beneath the water's surface, drowning. He is so stunned by the apparition that he considers jumping in to save her, but when he blinks again she is gone. Nothing more than a figment of his imagination, he concludes, a trick of the light. But the face is still with him when he gets off the ferry at the next island, when he reaches the port of Piraeus, boards a plane in Athens, and lands in an unfamiliar airport where he searches for someone he hardly knows, fishing through his pockets for a crumpled paper that will give him a clue about where he is.

The drowning woman's face occasionally winks at him playfully from mirrors, from the squeaky clean glass of shop windows, then vanishes into thin air. It is a face he will keep looking for but will never find. A mirage worthy of a mythical name, the only name he remembers from his time on Nysas, the name that belongs to a woman he'd never met.

Ariadne sleeps in late on the day of Julian's departure, straight into the afternoon, and is troubled by dreams she doesn't understand:

She is kneeling by a lake, transfixed by its calm surface. She is shocked when she realizes that the face staring back at her from the blue mirror is not hers at all, but the face of a man—a man she's never seen before but whom she instantly loves. She reaches out to stroke his cheek, to push the hair out of his watery eyes, and as her fingertips ripple the lake's surface, a hand reaches up and pulls her under. She sees herself thrashing and feels her lungs filling with water. Then another sensation: incredible calm as this marvellous underwater creature wraps its long arms around her. She stops struggling and together they slowly sink towards the soft, sandy bottom, her hair streaming like seaweed above her, her clothes floating off her body towards the surface. The need to know the difference between up and down has left her. The divine creature dives to the bottom before her and lies back. He spreads his arms to catch her, and she reaches out to him, wanting to stay forever in his embrace.

Ariadne wakes up with a start, right before she lands at the lake's bottom. Her heart is racing and she takes a deep breath. She gets up and looks at herself in the mirror, and for a moment she thinks she sees the face from her dream, but when she looks again he is gone. By the time she has her cheese pie, she's already forgotten the details of the dream, but she still feels incredibly tired and famished, as if she's returned from a long and arduous journey. She asks for the second cheese pie in the glass case and devours it in three bites. For the rest of the day she looks over her shoulder compulsively, expecting to see the man from her dreams following her, expecting to recognize him immediately.

That night at work she hangs a black cloth over the cracked mirror. "Tired of looking at myself," she offers as an excuse, and the regulars applaud. The real reason for the shroud is that she hopes by covering the mirror, the dark man, so like her, will materialize. Will walk into the Scat Club when her back is turned and will tap her on the shoulder, then lead her away without uttering a word. She is more than prepared to go without notice, leaving all her baggage behind.

Before the night fizzles out, she does feel a tap on her shoulder. She turns around quickly, expecting a miracle. She gets one, of sorts, but not the one she hoped for. There is a man beaming at her, throwing his arms around her, pulling her close to his breast and holding her there as if he will never let go. A man who has come to save her, to take her far away. Rut has returned, unannounced. But Ariadne doesn't want to go anywhere with Rut, and in her disappointment she tells him so abruptly, then banishes him from the island forever. She must stay right there, in the Scat Club, by the shrouded mirror. She crawls under the black cloth and presses her cheek against the cool glass.

By the next afternoon, a second visitor appears, as if alerted by some unearthly force. Someone no one expects to see on Nysas, especially not Ariadne, especially not now. No one but Maria, who left the island on a mission to find a punishment for Ariadne crueler than the evil eye, is prepared for his arrival. Since there are no secrets on Nysas, she knew where to look for him, exactly what to say, and what kind of bribe to offer. Married to a devil herself, she guessed what his effect might be. That the affair between Ariadne and Daniel has been over for weeks is of no relevance to her. There are some trajectories (and tragedies) that cannot be aborted, some debts that must be repaid with blood. Maria brings the visitor back with her on the ferry, points him towards Ariadne's door and backs away.

Ariadne nearly faints when she sees him standing there. Out of shock, fear and happiness all at the same time. She has to hold onto the door frame to keep from collapsing. She forgets his name and then her own. She forgets to invite him in, afraid that her room is too small to contain him. When he finally steps over the threshold without an invitation, she apologizes for the state of her room: the bed unmade, clothes strewn all over the floor. She feels instantly unravelled by his non-plussed stare. Exposed. Guilty. Ashamed.

Maria smiles as she watches the reunion from the field where Kyr Georgis' donkey grazes . Two birds with one stone, she thinks and sniggers to herself. Her husband deprived of Ariadne, onto whom she has dealt the worst curse she could think up. She has sent her rival that which she most desires, that which will bring her as close as possible to the ecstasy of death. Maria knows the nature of that pain, that deep infernal longing for something that can never be satisfied. She lives that longing with the beautiful Daniel, and if she is forced to share her husband with Ariadne, it is only fair that Ariadne share some of the pain.

Maria bursts into crazy laughter as she walks back through the village. Tourists walk circles around her not wanting to be singed by her insanity. Upon entering her leather shop, she kisses Daniel sweetly, and asks him if he missed her while she was away.

Back at Kyr Georgis', Ariadne holds the visitor tightly against her body and wails towards the heavens. Her voice echoes through the alleyways, over the roofs. Everyone in town stops to listen to her cries, looking towards the sky for the gods who make such anomalous sounds. No one can agree whether what they hear is joyous laughter or the terrible shrieking of torture. The wiser of the villagers say it is both. Father Theodoros rings the church bells and old ladies cross themselves solemnly, thankful that their time for such upheaval has passed. Clouds roll in overhead and it begins to rain with thunder but no lightening. It never rains in August on Nysas. Something is definitely amiss, some god offended. The old ladies run for cover.

Down at the beach all havoc breaks loose. Naked women huddle under the bamboo roof of the Way Out Café, hiding their breasts and their neatly trimmed pubic hair with their hands. The sea rages black, swallowing the drunks who didn't heed its warning, spitting them dead and bloated onto the sand. Five drown that day, naked and nameless, unmissed by their families. "Sodom and Gomorra Burns!!!" the Athens papers will report jubilantly.

The electricity goes out, and for the first time since Ariadne set foot on Nysas, the Scat Club does not open at six, and even if it had, Ariadne would not be there to do it. There can be no jazz without electricity and the last performers were thrown off of Nysas weeks ago. Not even the regulars are interested in the silent, empty bar.

Word of his arrival spreads like a brush fire through the village. Ariadne holds him closer, presses into him until she can't tell where she ends and he begins. Yet she continues to fall, faster than before. She presses harder, wanting her body to disappear into his, wanting to enter him like a spirit that will infuse him with her love. But something blocks her entry. A sharp object jabs her belly, his belt buckle maybe, or a ring of keys hung from a belt loop. She squeezes her hand between their nearly deliquesced bodies, and her fingers discover a small cylinder of cold hard metal trying to pierce through her belly. She looks down and sees a gold handgun, as small and innocuous as a stapler, held against her by her beloved's hand. She backs away from him slowly and stares at him, confused.

"What should I do to the woman who has ruined my life, sweet Ariadne? Can you tell me what I should do?" He smiles cynically, his sharp cheekbones almost piercing through his drawn, white flesh. He hooks his finger on the trigger and trains the barrel between her breasts. Ariadne covers her face with her hands.

Yannis is back and the gods watch with horror and undivided interest.

44.

The gun in Yannis' hand, in Ariadne's belly. The little gold gun the size of a stapler, with its pearl inlaid handle, Yannis' finger on its golden trigger, which curves outward like the capped fang of a rich, crazy man.

Everyone has their version of a story, a personal slant on a set of circumstances and their outcome. For instance, somewhere in Yannis' drug-addled brain, he has

decided that he is the victim of some plot of Ariadne's to "ruin his life" and has chosen to do something about it, to kill her with this little gold gun poked into the tender curve of her belly where he once rested his head comfortably in the middle of the night.

Where did Yannis get this gun, this sexy piece of destruction concealed inside clothing like genitals, revealed in all its glory in a moment of passion? It's not hard to imagine that the lowlifes that he skulks around with in alleyways and dank basement apartments in Athens would have the inside track on instruments of death, other than rusted syringes. But this little gold gun with its exquisite pearl inlaid handle is too delicate a work of art for their likes. This gun was carefully designed by someone with the belief that death should be beautiful, tasteful and artistic—a moment of supreme inspiration as powerful as a first kiss, as tragic as the last.

You can imagine the gun resting on a blue velvet cloth in the display case of a very exclusive shop, the kind of shop where a liveried doorman buzzes you in if he approves of your looks. The gun is polished so that it gleams like a gemstone, glinting and winking from its case, catching the soft glow of the shop's halogen lights, which cast a candlelit radiance on everyone who stands beneath them, making them instantly desirable.

The customer leans over the display case and studies the possibilities. Asks the smiling, but not overbearing clerk for the black pistol with the sight—a larger piece than the gold gun, but also polished and shining like onyx. He squints down the sight and centers the smiling clerk's face in its thin, perfect cross.

"Bang. Bang. I got mine," shouts the customer and laughs. The clerk laughs, too, that forced laugh that he is paid to laugh. He has guns pointed at his head all day long and has ceased to find it funny. Every morning when he reports for duty, he checks all the guns to make sure no one has loaded them in the night.

The customer asks to see a few other specimens: a silver one with scenes from the old west carved into its handle; a bright red metallic one, the colour of expensive

lipstick; a transparent one made of state-of-the-art plastic, which brazenly displays its complex machinery like the inside of a pocket watch, all its tiny levers and wheels conspiring to push the bullet out of the barrel and into the belly of the loved one as she watches.

For these guns are designed especially for love. An enemy or a stranger shot from a passing car could be dispatched with any old gun, one passed from hand to hand in a paper bag in an alleyway, then tossed drunkenly without a second thought into a polluted river. The guns in this shop are to be treasured, valued for life. Their careful design, their stunning originality, they are all one of a kind to be mounted and framed, hung with a hunter's pride next to the mounted head or heart of his prize. These guns wear their *métier* proudly, coquettishly. You could almost forget their sole intention in their dazzling sleekness, their uninhibited seductiveness.

The customer tries different guns on for size, bouncing them in his hand to test their weight, drawing them out of his coat pocket slowly, and presenting them like a jewel in a red velvet box to the surprised recipient. He rehearses his line like a marriage proposal, over and over again until the words are perfect.

"What should I do to the woman who has ruined my life?" Genuflecting is optional, but also effective.

None of the guns feels right, and the customer places them, one after the other, on the counter. The clerk leaves them there in case a second trial is necessary. He has learned not to comment upon the appropriateness of the gun unless asked. If asked, he gathers pertinent information like who the gun is for, in what atmosphere the rendezvous, the proposal, the binding kiss will take place. His ability to match customer to gun is something he takes pride in, though he could never put it on a résumé.

The clerk has practically emptied the entire display case for the customer. There is only one gun left, the little gold one with the pearl inlaid handle. The finest gun in the shop, as shiny as a wedding ring.

"For very special cases," the clerk offers as he gently lays the gun on the counter, careful not to leave any fingerprints on its smooth surface.

The customer hesitates before picking up the gun, like that moment of pause before a first kiss, or the numbing awe in the presence of a masterpiece. He reaches out slowly, his hand shaking, and fingers the delicate craftsmanship, strokes the cold metal against his cheek. He runs through the script one more time; the draw, the opening line. "Bang," he finally whispers and the clerk notices tears in his eyes as the customer puts the gun back into his pocket. The clerk is moved, too. It is not often that he witnesses such a natural fusion, such a perfect match between customer and weapon. He resists the urge to break out in applause.

The customer pays for the gun and the clerk drops it into a small, blue velvet pouch with gold-tasseled draw strings. At the last moment he remembers to drop in the bullet, hard, sharp and finely cut as a diamond. He shakes the customer's hand, congratulates him, wishes him luck in his endeavours. In a way the clerk is sad to see the gun go. All that time polishing it, admiring it in its cradle, he imagined that one day he might find a reason to buy it himself, that in some way it might fit him. But these guns, he has come to realize after years behind the locked doors of the exclusive shop, were designed with one special customer in mind. The little gold gun with the pearl inlaid handle was meant for a lady—to kill her, that is. As the customer leaves the shop, satisfied and swinging his gold-tasseled bag, the clerk prays to the deities that one day he too might experience such boundless and consummate love.

Ariadne looks down at the little gold gun pressed into her belly and backs away with a nervous laugh. This is the first completely lucid moment she's experienced in her entire life, where her soul acknowledges that it lives inside her body and if her body goes, it will be curtains for her soul, too. This is the moment, she realizes, that the gods have pushed her off a cliff.

"Are you crazy?" she gasps, trying to sound flirtatious as she backs into the wall.

"Crazy with love," Yannis replies, smiling at her, coming closer and raising the gun towards her heart. He presses himself against her and gives her a slow passionate kiss as he stares into her wide-open, terrified eyes.

"You should never have left me like that, Ariadne. All alone in my room, helpless and crying out for you. You're a very wicked girl, my love." And he kisses her again.

She manages to squeeze out from under him, but the barrel of the gun follows her as if she were a magnet. She sits on her bed, taking a deep breath and swallowing hard. "But you left me. You and Medea." A sourness rises in her throat and chokes her as she says Medea's name.

Yannis laughs condescendingly, as if Ariadne has just pronounced the stupidest thing in the world. "I was just using that whore. Spending her stinking, dog house money. You should have known that, my little silly. But you had no faith in our love." He kisses the barrel of the gun, then presses it to her lips. "Kiss it," he orders. "I bought it especially for you." Ariadne makes a small popping sound with her lips, then pulls her head back.

"Not like that, my sweet. Let me see you part those juicy lips, bring out that rare tongue of yours and lick it, like you used to do with my dick in the morning." He pushes the gun's barrel up against her lips again, and this time she takes it in. The metal tastes like blood, she thinks, as tears start rolling down her cheeks.

"Where has that lovely tongue of yours wrapped itself lately? What type of Nysas shit has it licked up, my love?" He thrusts the barrel back and forth in her mouth until she gags. He then gets down on one knee and licks away the trail left by her tears on her cheeks.

"Don't cry," he coos. "We're all together now." He locks his gaze on her with his pin-prick eyes, and runs the little gold gun across her cheek. Ariadne nods, swallowing a scream.

"I'm going to take a little nap now, but don't you go away. We wouldn't want to miss you." He runs the gun's barrel between her legs, then stretches out on her bed, folding his arms over his chest like a corpse and shutting his eyes. He taps the mattress with the gun. "You sit right here and keep us company. You're not going to run out on us again. The three of us will be together for evermore. We've crossed seas for you."

Yannis nods off, the gun still pressed into Ariadne's side. She sits in the dark room as the storm rages outside, not even daring to get up to light a candle to soften the darkness, to allow her to stare at his sleeping face. The face she had so longed to see, so peaceful and innocent while it dreams.

For entire moments as she sits by him, she forgets about the gun pointing at her, though she can still taste its steeliness on her tongue. In other moments she is seized with doubt and confusion. Did she betray him, lose faith in their love? Did she flee Athens too quickly when she should have waited patiently? It had all seemed so clear at the time: Yannis, Medea, his guitar case sitting in Medea's hallway instead of hers, her guts ripped out and stomped upon by Medea, her best friend. Hadn't he refused to speak to her after she'd discovered them? Didn't he dismiss her on the street?

"I can't stand to look at you," he said. "May our paths never cross again." He then walked away, leaving her rooted to the spot on the street corner by his house, gutted, as dusk descended upon her indifferently, casting its shadow onto her blank face. Is it possible that she had misunderstood?

She sits there motionless in the darkness of her room while he sleeps, running through each detail of her last days in Athens, seeing it all before her like a film projected onto her face by the glint of the little gold gun, like a final accounting before the end credits roll and a judgment must be made.

Section VI

45.

The following scenes are the ones the Norwegian director craved, the ones the bald French pornographer would shoot if he had the imagination to move beyond the vulgarity of naked flesh and into the literature of the body, which provides a context for its nakedness.

One afternoon, upon returning from her job at the Hotel Thisavros, Ariadne unlocked her front door and plopped herself into bed, exhausted. As usual, Yannis was not home, but Ariadne did not immediately notice the other absence: the stereo, the TV, the guitar case, all gone. She lay back on her double mattress, letting the tiredness that had dogged her all day behind the reception desk have its way with her. It is only when she awoke a few hours later, as she stretched her limbs and regained her bearings in the day split in half by two sleeps—one shared, one gloriously solitary—that she noticed Yannis' things had disappeared. Her heart skipped a beat and then another, the shock of the discovery suspending her into timelessness. When she was able to move again, she searched for the missing belongings in the most ludicrous and unlikely places: underneath the cushions of the canvas chairs, out on the long, marble balcony, in the closet that was too small for even a skinny child to hide in.

When none of his things turned up it occurred to her that the apartment had been robbed, and that Yannis would kill her when he got home. She looked around to see if any of her belongings were gone: the few pieces of junk jewelry she still possessed, her red leather jacket. Nothing was missing but her savings, stored loosely in a cookie tin until the next trip to the bank, whose erratic hours didn't match hers. She hid the remaining baubles in a bucket under the sink so she could pretend to share in the loss,

then pulled a few items of clothing from her closet, scattered them across the floor like bodies felled in flight in order to provide the proper staging for the crime. What careful thieves, she thought, as she created her own mess. How did they get in, from the balcony or through the kitchen window? She considered using her small yellow hammer on the window that looked out towards the harbour, smashing it to bits like the full length mirror Yannis had destroyed the week before.

It happened during a skirmish when Ariadne reminded Yannis that he had emblazoned his love across the looking glass in red lipstick on the same day they'd committed their passion to film with Medea's help.

"Bullshit," he screamed, "it was all bullshit," and his face went scarlet as he lifted the mirror above his head, then dropped it onto the marble floor. It exploded into waves of jagged glass. Next, he grabbed the camera, tearing it open and yanking out the film. The coils unraveled like a brown snake, drowning in the shimmering pool.

"Now it's all gone. It never existed." He pulled at his bony fingers one at a time until he heard each one crack. "Who could prove I was ever here in this fucking trap with you? If you tell anyone, I'll say you're crazy."

Ariadne was unclear about the cause of this particular outburst. It was just one in a series of tantrums that she had learned to almost ignore. At least they no longer made her cry. She went into the kitchen and came back with a dustpan and a broom. She got down on her knees and began to sweep, singing quietly to herself to allay the howls, obscenities, insults and the plain insanity that he whipped her with on a regular basis.

"Before you kidnapped me I was a star, a fucking hero. You've sucked the life out of me like a black spider, you nobody, castrater, bitch..."

Ariadne kept sweeping, seeking out every last shard. His attack hardly made a mark this time because after every beating her skin got tougher, harder to break, and her

ears had become deaf to words that had been repeated too often; they lost all sense, becoming nothing more than maddening sounds like screeching brakes and car alarms. As Yannis' voice rose, salamanders, snails and bloated black waterbugs rolled off his tongue, covering the sea of glass with their slime. Ariadne sang louder so that neither of them heard the banging from below, the broomstick denting the ceiling, the downstairs neighbour yelling at the top of her lungs for them to shut up.

*May I make an observation
Your bite is worse than my aggression
I should have known better
I should have known better
than to become a target
oh be a target that moves*

Ariadne sang, her voice cracking on the high notes, as the pieces of glass clinked into the metal dustpan, then were cast off the balcony, five flights down, a miniature meteor shower raining onto the pavement. "The sky is falling, the sky is falling," she called out to Yannis, who scurried away from the apartment building, no bigger than a sand crab. He didn't look up at her, but she watched him until he disappeared from her view. She sat on the balcony with her back to the wall and fell asleep. When she opened her eyes again, he was back and all apologies. He brought her a hand-held mirror with a golden frame, which looked like it might have belonged to Marie Antionette before she lost her head. Carved and heavy, the mirror required a servant to hold it up.

The next day Ariadne rode the trolley to Yannis' parents' house, intending to leave the mirror at the door like an unwanted baby. But at the last minute she knocked, and his mother let her in. The two women looked at each other with the same tired eyes. Ariadne held out the mirror and started to cry. The older woman ushered her into the living room and for the first time Ariadne saw the ruins of Yannis' home. Display cabinets bare except for a few bibelots culled from weddings and baptisms. Bright rectangular spaces jumped out from faded, greyish walls where pictures had once hung.

On an otherwise empty shelf, his mother replaced the mirror with its brush and thanked Ariadne.

"You must leave him," the older woman advised as she swirled Greek coffee grounds in her cup before turning it onto its rim and watching the thick brown ooze puddle in the saucer.

"But I can't leave, I love him. I'll die." Ariadne wept into her cup and her tears cut roads into its muddy map.

"He'll kill you first. That's how he is." The older woman studied her own cup first, deciphering the hieroglyphics on its walls, then shaking her head. "If I weren't his mother, I would leave, too. Look at me, I'm barely alive." In Mrs. Vissinos' coffee cup the image of a serpent had formed, slithering around the periphery of the rim and threatening to rear its vicious head and bite her nose off for the blasphemy of forsaking her own flesh. She turned the cup back onto the saucer without a word, then picked up Ariadne's cup, turning it in her hands as she read. An apparition with wings clung to one side of the cup, a heavenly figure, white against the brown. Mrs. Vissinos discreetly blotted out a horned figure on the other side with her thumb.

"The signs are good," the older woman assured, nodding slowly. "If you leave, you will not die. You have an angel watching over you." She handed Ariadne the cup, and the younger woman peered into it. Yes, she could see the wings. But she refrained from telling her hostess that she didn't believe in fortune telling, angels or dreams, and Yannis' mother didn't mention the devil or tell Ariadne that the angel might represent her death. She knew that signs could be read in many ways depending on the intentions of the reader.

"Go home, my dear girl, and tell him to leave you. You'll be better off without him. Please, do as I say."

Ariadne thanked the woman for her kindness and concern, then at the last moment hugged her. She buried her face in the older woman's fleshy neck, sank her

fingers into the hairsprayed curls that Mrs. Vissinos tugged on as she spoke—out of nervousness, exasperation and fear of what the fates had in store for her next, the resulting *coiffe* making Yannis' mother look permanently shocked.

"He's the devil incarnate, you know. *Diabolos*. Who could have known? He was such a sweet boy." The older woman wiped away a tear and rubbed her thumb against her apron, leaving a brown smear. "When he was little he was afraid of the dark and wouldn't go to sleep unless I held his hand." Both women smiled sadly, though they were no longer looking at each other.

Ariadne went home determined to follow the woman's advice, but when she walked towards the front door of the apartment building she was swept up into a galaxy of stars lying on the black ground, twinkling in the light of the dusk moon, transforming the cold, hard ground into heaven. When the suddenly smooth elevator whisked her up to the fifth floor, Yannis was there waiting for her in the hallway, looking distraught. He thought she'd run away, and what would he do without her? He knew he didn't deserve her, but if she left him he'd die. Ariadne wrapped her arms around him and assured him she was going nowhere without him, that they'd be together forever. "Until death do us part, my love."

"Let's get married." He got down on both knees and kissed the palms of Ariadne's hands. "Let's move away from this place, to America or England. They want me in England. If you run away with me I'll know that you love me. Until death do us part."

They kissed and it was as good as a vow to Ariadne. Perhaps the angel in the cup was really Yannis in the future, free of heroin, clean and pure and floating above her, holding her hand through the night. If a broken mirror could transmogrify into stars, why couldn't the devil take back his sins and become an angel again?

For a few weeks Ariadne was happy, things between them were better than ever. He came home every night and they talked of their future: Paris, London, New York—the

whole world would open up for them once they escaped wretched Athens with all its dirt and ruins. He went back to the treatment center, got more tranquilizers and took them regularly with Ariadne's help. Everything seemed perfect, a permanent high, until she came home that afternoon and everything was gone.

Ariadne felt numb. She slumped into a chair and went over the different ways to tell Yannis that his things had been stolen. Her agony was prolonged by the fact that he was late, very late, for the first time in weeks. She thought the worst immediately.

She went down to the corner store and called his mother's house five, six, seven times—once an hour until the store finally closed up for the night. His mother was evasive, and none of her former friendliness remained in her voice. "Stop calling," she implored. "There's nothing I can tell you." Hour after hour the older woman's voice became colder as Ariadne's became more desperate.

"If he's there, please let me speak to him." Ariadne begged pitifully despite the presence of the store owner, who hovered behind her piling boxes of shoelaces on the shelf above her head.

The store owner had long ago become uninterested in Ariadne's plight. He'd found the first few phone calls during the first few weeks of the affair mildly amusing: the passion of a young girl worn proudly and pathetically on her sleeve. But now, after a few months, the tune was all too familiar, a broken record, the needle stuck on a desperate refrain that had become meaningless in its repetition.

By midnight Ariadne passed out from the sheer tension, upright in a chair, her head lolling forward and snapping back. Her dreams were filled with angels with fiery wings who laughed at her from above as she crouched naked behind the rocks of some unknown beach. From flaming bows they shot at her with glass arrows, which exploded like fireworks as they crashed to the ground.

At three a.m. she woke up and crawled into her empty bed. She reached into the small bowl on the floor by the mattress and broke one of Yannis' tranquilizers in half, swallowed it without water and slept the dreamless sleep of the dead for the next twelve hours. She was disoriented when she awoke the next morning, and for a moment she completely forgot the events of the day before: the robbery (which she now knew was no robbery), the phone calls, and the terrible silence that had descended upon her apartment again. It was exactly like the beginning, when she first arrived in Athens and realized that she had lost everything. She would have sold her soul to break that terrible silence, to banish it forever. But here it was again, in all its dreadful glory, filling her small apartment like gas.

Then, from outside, a break in the silence. The elevator squeaked towards the fifth floor and keys jangled in the hallway. Ariadne ran to the door and pulled it open, her heart pounding in her throat then dropping to her feet with a thud. She stood half-naked before her landlord, who smiled at her lewdly.

She crept back into bed and plugged her ears against the silence, then swallowed the second half of the tranquilizer. She didn't try phoning Yannis' mother again, half believing that the old sibyl had kidnapped him to keep him for herself. She had heard of this type of scary marriage between Greek mothers and sons before. She didn't bother calling the Hotel Thisavros to tell them she wouldn't be coming back, or that they could keep her last pay cheque and bet it on the horse with the worst odds. In her deep dreamless sleep, the rest of the world did not exist. The corner store disappeared along with the building that housed it. The apartment she lived in fell away, the walls lying in crumpled heaps on the ground, obliterating the glass stars.

46.

Snapshots of Ariadne to be taken home by tourists and other curiosity seekers, sent through the post anonymously like a Peeping Tom's blackmail:

- 1. Ariadne is groggy and confused. She lifts her head from a pillow dampened by drool. She is unaware of the time, whether it is day or night. Blinded by the explosion of the flashcube, she squeezes her eyes shut, pushes a hand out towards the camera, trying to stop it. This photo of Ariadne is black and white, overexposed. Every edge in the image is washed out, ghostly—the chairs, the bed, the lines that shape Ariadne's face—everything looks rounded, smooth and soft. The dark circles under her eyes have disappeared, and despite being caught off guard, cruelly roused from her forgetful sleep, Ariadne looks fresh, younger than she is: pale, perfect and unscarred as a butterfly.

Like a patient with an exotic neurological disorder, every time Ariadne woke from her drug-induced slumber, she was forced to relive the agony of Yannis' departure. Each awakening was the same, neither more nor less intense than the first time two days earlier (for though days were both endless and abstract to Ariadne in her false tranquillity, they continued to pass with no feeling of responsibility towards her). Every time was the first time: the discovery, the denial, the futile fight against the obvious. She paced the apartment, listened for the elevator, for footsteps outside. She looked over the balcony railing and calculated how long it would take for her to land if she jumped, but decided against it; like Vladimir, Estragon and their rope, she found a glimmer of hope deep inside her that assured *He* would show up tomorrow.

He wouldn't just leave without a word, without a message scrawled on the bathroom mirror in lipstick, would he? Something urgent must have come up. He was

called away to England to record his third album and had to catch a flight the very minute he got off the phone or the deal was off.

No.

He was holed up in his studio, caught in a frenzy of creative energy that allowed for no intrusion from the outside world. Maybe. But what about his things? Why did he take them? He took them because he didn't know how long he'd be away and needed them for those rare moments of rest.

No.

He was lying dead in a ditch, a needle stabbed into his blue arm, and his junkie friends had come for his things since in his last breath he'd bequeathed them everything. This last scenario made Ariadne cry each time it recurred, for the loss of him, his talent, and the song on the third album that was meant for her. She didn't even have a picture of him so she could see his face as she mourned over his tombstone, the photograph clasped to her heart. The one she carried in her wallet had mysteriously disappeared weeks ago, and she'd meant to ask him for another copy but couldn't find a way to explain the original's fate. Now it was too late. She'd never love another, she swore as she wept over the imaginary cold slab of marble.

No.

He had left her, without a second thought, like a coward—like a thief. He'd stolen away to sell himself in dark alleys so she wouldn't have him anymore.

Ariadne drew the shutters and sat down on her bed again. She picked through the bowl, looking for fragments of tranquilizer, sucking the dust off her shaking fingertips. Besides taking her out of time and space, the tranquilizers became a surrogate for his presence. She began to believe that the blocks of black peace they brought had the identical effect on her that Yannis did—soothing and comforting, enveloping her in a hollow serenity. In his arms she felt safe and complete as if she were tucked inside him. His pills, the only thing he left behind, were this serenity decocted.

Perhaps with their help she could wean herself off him. There were no treatment centers for her disease, though the symptoms were well known.

Ariadne's whole body hurt. She felt dizzy, nauseated, and her heart beat irregularly. Her apartment was cold, so bloody cold. She licked the bowl clean of tranquilizer dust, grimacing at the substitute's bitterness, nowhere near as sweet as the taste of Yannis' saliva dripping off her chin, sliding between her breasts. She lay back on the pillows and crossed her arms over her chest. She fell asleep briefly, no longer than fifteen minutes. And when she woke up it started all over again, every detail repeated, reinforced by the repetition, a well-rehearsed episode in a play with its seamless segue into the next woeful scene. It was only when she went back to the bowl and found it completely empty, licked clean, that she decided to leave the apartment to get some help. The first person she thought of was Medea. Medea would know where to look. Thank Hera for Medea, her only true friend. How lucky she was to have her.

47.

- 2. In the second photo we see Ariadne in a dimly lit, wooden cattle car. She is riding the subway built by the Nazis to haul their asses back and forth in Athens during the war. Ariadne is reaching into her purse to look for loose change for one of the underground's many beggars. All we see of the beggar is a crippled hand with webbed fingers stretched out like a net before Ariadne's face. This second photo is also black and white, but this time underexposed so that everything is in shadow, carving out the image like a woodcut, pressing shades of black ink onto white paper. Ariadne's face is not clearly visible in the chiaroscuro. It is turned away so we see only her profile as it hovers between her purse and the beggar's hand.

Stop after stop as she rode the subway across town, Ariadne was confronted by freaks who evoked distinct and conflicting emotions in her. Revulsion, pity, empathy and, most surprisingly, identification. She watched them parade through the car at every station like a carnival side show, announcing their pain like barkers then daring the passengers to gaze upon fate's cruel artwork, which had left them at the mercy of a squeamish and indifferent world.

The old man in his elf-green suit hunched over Ariadne, staring at her sightlessly through eyes that seemed welded shut. He breathed his fetid breath into her face as she dropped her offerings into his outstretched hand. In his other hand he clutched a small cassette player, which assaulted the passengers with the guilt-inducing wail of Greek Orthodox chanting. The monster carried God with him from car to car like a calling card, a subpoena for the miserly to the court of damnation. (It is fortunate for those gazing curiously upon the photo that they can't hear the tinny music.)

Ariadne watched as the old man left her car and ran to the next one, feeling his way along the outside walls until he found an opening, then slipping in just as the doors were about slide shut. As he left, his replacement arrived: a young woman wearing a tattered dress strewn with faded flowers. The dress was too big for her, so she'd belted it at the waist with a rope tied into a noose. Her hair was covered by a similarly ragged kerchief, and she stood at the front end of the car in a pair of overlarge, men's shoes, her toes waving at the passengers through holes cut out of the leather like sandals.

This woman performed a balancing act with the precision of a tightrope walker as she stepped through the shaking car, her too-big shoes hitting the floor with a definitive smack. Her arms were stretched out before her, and in her hands she held a small frame covered in multicoloured pills of all shapes and sizes, which rolled from side to side with the swaying of the car, but did not fall off.

"My name is Anastasia," she called out in a loud and squeaky voice. "I have been diagnosed as psychotic. I have the official paper here." She pointed to the document

pressed into the pill-covered frame. No one asked to read the declaration, they just took her word for it. "I take forty five pills a day to keep myself from getting drastic. They will take my children away from me if I don't take these pills." She jiggled the frame and the pills chattered like teeth against the glass, a few jumped up and down like Mexican jumping beans. "I am psychotic," she declared even louder. "Help me, good Christians."

Ariadne reached into her purse again, and tossed a few drachmas onto the frame as Anastasia pushed it under her nose. She caught a glimpse of an official stamp and an elaborate signature at the bottom of the framed document, the word "*PSYCHOPATHIS*" at the top in boldfaced, block letters. Ariadne looked into the woman's eyes. Everyone gave Anastasia money, but not one person on the subway car looked into her eyes, afraid they might catch what she had or turn into stone. Anastasia's eyes looked past Ariadne at nothing and no one as she walked down the aisle, one foot carefully placed before the other. She stared off into the distance as if she were addressing some other audience, far away, beyond the walls of the subway car, beyond the station. The people in front of her were not even there, and her glowing, watery eyes cast the eerie light of that other land she inhabited onto the dark faces of all the passengers. Everyone, including Ariadne, was glad when the next stop finally came.

But the show, ladies and gentleman, voyeurs of all ages, was not over. A young man got on and handed an x-ray to the first passenger in the first seat by the front and directed him to look at it and pass it on. Each passenger held the x-ray up to the dim light, gazing through the skeletal head, trying to imagine what they looked like from the inside.

"My name is Little Fanis. You have read about me in the paper." A murmur of recognition rose amongst the passengers—yes, they had heard. "One year ago I was shot through the head. It is a miracle I'm still alive." More murmuring and the x-ray was passed to Ariadne, who stared at the perfect hole in the skull, a third eye opened up

between the empty sockets. She then turned her attention to the coin-sized scar on Little Fanis' forehead. It moved up and down as he spoke, closing when his forehead wrinkled and winking lubriciously at all that fell under its gaze. Ariadne turned away and reached behind her to pass the x-ray to the next passenger, but there was no one there. She was the last one in the car, and as the train pulled into the next station, Little Fanis approached her, touching her hand as he reached out to take his picture back. His third eye winked shamelessly and wandered down Ariadne's shirt as she gave him her last handful of change and pulled her jacket tightly over her chest.

There was only one stop to go, a short one thankfully. Ariadne was determined to sit stiff as marble and not look at the next unfortunate to board the train with a claim against fate. But the voice that called out before the last stop was small and scared, a wobbly voice half-crying its plea. It was the voice of a gypsy girl, no more than five, barefoot and bare-armed to better display her twisted limbs. The girl hobbled from seat to seat, holding out a mangled hand and pleading in her little voice: "Mama bruised and broken, papa bruised and broken, I am bruised and broken. Mama bruised and broken, papa bruised and broken, I am bruised and broken."

Ariadne's throat tightened and her eyes began to water, tears spilling down her shadowy face, staining the fabric of her jacket. She had been told that gypsies sometimes deformed their own children at birth to prepare them for a lifetime of begging to earn their keep. The thought horrified Ariadne and she hoped it wasn't true, but as she looked at the skinny little beggar and her bruised and broken limbs, she could imagine that the girl's parents, both bruised and broken by their own families, had passed on to their daughter the only solution to life's burden that they knew. They couldn't fathom any other way for one of their own to live. The gypsy dancers taught their daughters to twirl in colourful skirts, stringing their strong ankles with bells that summoned their audience from far and wide with fairy tinkling. They showed their girls how to stamp the ground forcefully, how to spin ceaselessly without getting dizzy, how

to throw their arms above their heads while turning their wrists and strumming their graceful fingers, bidding the gods to join in the dance. This little girl was broken before she ever knew that music or dance existed. She was never offered another choice.

Ariadne dropped her head into her hands and began to weep, for the girl, for herself, for all the wounds that would never heal, the lesions that festered unceasingly through the generations. Ariadne wept openly, her whole body shaking, unable to control her anguish.

The little girl approached her and stroked Ariadne's hair and face with her small, twisted hand. "Don't cry, lady," she consoled and then smiled, "it doesn't hurt that much."

Ariadne reached blindly into her purse for some change, but there was none left. Her hand found the little silver box with the Byzantine cross that Yannis had given her on the one day he'd loved her madly. Her fingers felt the engraving, and she hesitated before plucking it out and offering it to the little girl. The girl looked at the box and closed her crooked fingers around it. She then took Ariadne's hand in her own and kissed it. "You have beautiful hands, lady." She stroked Ariadne's straight fingers gently, as if they were made of porcelain and she was afraid to break them. "My mama tells me I'll be beautiful when I grow up."

The train ground to a halt and the little girl, still clutching the box, waved at Ariadne before limping onto the platform and entering the next car. Ariadne followed her out onto the platform and watched the girl through the window as she dragged herself down the aisle, crying out her mantra for all to hear. "Mama bruised and broken, Papa bruised and broken, I am bruised and broken." The little girl didn't look out at the platform again. For her, neither it nor Ariadne existed, only the inside of subway cars where she was fated to sell her inheritance.

A second wave of tears overwhelmed Ariadne as she climbed the station's wooden stairs into the night air. Her tears froze on her cheeks, forming jagged icicles

that broke off her chin and shattered into a thousand slivers before melting into the dirty sidewalk. She shook with cold, though it was unseasonably warm tonight. The shaking came from a place inside, from her own inherited wound, that bruised and broken self that cowered, trembling with fear because it knew the blow it was about to endure. Ariadne marched on intrepidly, unconscious and unprepared for the damage that awaited her around the next corner, the devastation that would send her running through life like a subway beggar, pleading for mercy from onlookers unconvinced that behind her clear and alert eyes, inside her straight and unblemished limbs she was mangled, the worst sort of cripple, condemned to walk the underground blindly, groping at walls to keep herself upright, waiting for someone to offer her a hand, to lead her away.

48.

- 3. Photo number three shows Ariadne standing outside a door in the dirty foyer of an apartment building. We see her from the back, slouching slightly as she waits, her right hand clenched in a blurred fist and held as if she is about to knock, or alternately as if she is cursing the closed door for denying her presence, for its refusal to yield to her wish. There is another important element in the photo besides Ariadne and the closed door. A peephole in the door stares into the camera's lens defiantly, and it seems to be shining a light around Ariadne's face, giving her a halo. It is this peephole that dominates the photo, this Cyclops and its secret interior, not Ariadne's waving fist, nor the dirty floor she stands on, nor the little black blur rounding the corner at the right of the frame, which might be a rat (and Ariadne is terrified of rats) or the black pointed shoe of a man who has been lurking in a corner and is about to slide in behind Ariadne and knife her in the back. This photo is sepia-toned, the colour of a memory. Its crenellated edges are already curling as if

the photo is burning from the middle, closing in onto its hot, smoking center, trying to extinguish its own pain, trying to wrap around Ariadne and whisk her away from this door and its single eye, like an ash caught in the wind. Ariadne's hair is frizzed from the heat, her skirt burnt up to her knees, her knuckles are singed black and yellow.

There was movement on the other side of the door. First Medea planted her eye to the hole and snickered nervously. Then Yannis, the sought and beloved Yannis, stuck his glassy eye to the hole and upon seeing Ariadne standing there anxious and distraught, dragged his bony middle finger across his throat, before slinking into Medea's bedroom to spare himself the carnage. He put on his headphones and listened to an album he'd bought with the money from Ariadne's cookie tin. He felt no guilt, but instead laughed at the irony of the lyrics, and at the slaughter that was about to take place outside.

Medea pulled the door open, and Ariadne looked immensely relieved to see her friend. She was about to step into the apartment, as she always did, when she realized that Medea hadn't stepped aside to let her through. She looked into her friend's eyes, which ricocheted spastically in their sockets, and saw that the pupils were red and small as dust specs.

"You can't come in, Ariadne. I'm busy." Medea's words tumbled out quickly, running into each other and forming a wall.

"But I came all this way and I really need to talk to you. Are you OK?" Ariadne looked over her friend's shoulder. "Are you alone?"

"I said I'm busy." Medea snapped. "What is it you want?"

"Are you mad at me or something? Please don't be mad at me right now."

Ariadne's face crumpled as if she were about to cry. "Yannis has disappeared and I'm

crazy with worry. Please don't be mad at me, Medea. Forgive me just for today. Can't I just come in and talk to you for a few minutes? I came all this way."

A sob escaped Ariadne's throat as Medea stared at her dully. "Fine. Come in, but only for a few minutes. I'm busy and you can't just come here whenever the mood grabs you. I have a life, you know."

Ariadne rubbed away her tears and sighed in relief. She smiled gratefully at Medea and stepped through the door. Medea pointed to the kitchen and Ariadne moved out of the frame. The door shut ominously, as if of its own free will.

The door and its single eye continued to watch as a black rat scurried across the doormat shrieking like a terrified child. A man in a black hat, a long coat, and black pointed shoes emerged from the dark corner. He held a long, sharp knife on which a second black rat was impaled, its dark, sticky blood covering the man's hand and wrist, then running into the sleeve of his coat. He walked out onto the street holding his victim before him and disappeared into the strange night, satisfied that his work was complete.

The hallway is now empty, the closed door, motionless, the single eye rolled open and lifeless.

49.

- 4. In the last shot we see Ariadne slumped over a small table in Medea's tiny kitchen, her head propped up by her hands under her chin, her elbows resting on the table's sticky surface. Standing next to her, legs apart, feet firmly planted on the stained linoleum is Medea. Her hands rest on her hips and her mouth is deformed with speech as if she is scolding Ariadne, who looks back at her in distress. This is a special photo that captures a panorama of Medea's entire apartment within its frame. Moving left from the kitchen through the apartment's landscape, we see a hall closet, half open, the long arm of a guitar case reaching out as if from a coffin. Left

of the closet is Medea's bedroom, which contains the stretched out Yannis, his head at the foot of her bed, his hands holding a set of headphones to his ears, his eyes closed and his mouth open as he sings along with music only he can hear. Though we can't hear Yannis, with the carelessness of the open bedroom door perhaps Ariadne will hear his voice soon. Perhaps this is precisely what Medea, with her hands planted on her hips, intends. But we can't tell that from the photograph. It is merely an educated guess. One last thing about the photo. It was taken with a filter over the lens: Deep Carmine, which turns everything in its view sordid, tense and bloody, recreating the mysterious and expectant atmosphere of a darkroom where images alchemically emblazon themselves onto the thin white photographic paper of memory.

In the kitchen, Medea holds court, chastising her friend for her unbridled grief:

- Medea: Don't be such a little idiot. You knew that man would leave you from the day you met him. Everyone knew.
- Ariadne: What did you know? You never saw how we really were together. We were incredible.
- Medea: I took those pictures, remember? You didn't seem that shit hot to me. It was an act.
- Ariadne: (sarcastically) Is that why you ran off? Because we didn't put on enough of a show for you? Or were you jealous, my friend?
- Medea: Jealous of what? There's nothing that you've ever even imagined that I haven't already done a thousand times, you fool.
- Ariadne: Could you please stop calling me names. I'm having a really bad day. (Weeping resumes.)

Medea: Look at you, falling to pieces over a man who doesn't want you anymore. How pathetic. (Medea shakes her head in disgust.)

Ariadne: Is it pathetic to be in love? To feel someone belongs to you and you to him from the inside, forever, from before you were born?

Medea: Vissinos belongs to no one. (Medea grins smugly.)

Ariadne: I never knew you were so cold. I guess I was wrong to come here. I won't take up any more of your time.

Ariadne stood up and pushed past Medea into the red-tinted hallway, a sudden burst of indignation drying her tears in her throat, making her voice hoarse. "You won't hear from me again. If you want to apologize, you know where to find me."

Something turned over in Medea's brain and then snapped. "Me apologize to you? For what? What have I ever done to you except try to be your friend? Who came looking for you when everyone else thought you were dead in your damned acropolis. Who climbed the fucking stairs to make sure the maggots hadn't eaten your eyes? Me, that's who. And what did I get in return? Nothing. You left me for some shrunken dick. Well if that's the game you want to play, I can play it too, my girl. And I can play it better than some little nitwit from Canada, because I know the rules, the secret ways to win. You, Ariadne, are going to apologize to me, right now, or I'll eat your heart out."

Medea's fury backed Ariadne into the wall, right next to the half-open closet. "What are you talking about, Medea?" she screamed as loud as if she were retaliating in war. "Have you gone completely mad? It was never a choice between you or Yannis. It's not even the same thing."

"Get out before I kill you with my own hands, you bitch. Get out of my house." Medea shook with rage and shuffled from foot to foot like a boxer.

It was either dumb luck or simply fate that knocked the guitar case all the way out of the closet. It may have been the vibrations of the women's shrill voices that

propelled the arm of the case against the door, pushing it open slowly, its hinges creaking, until the door was wide open and the guitar case fell onto the floor between the two women without a sound. There was a deathly silence in the red hallway as Ariadne stared at the guitar case and then at Medea, who turned her face away, unable to withstand the accusation that beamed out of Ariadne's eyes.

No words formed in Ariadne's brain or passed through her lips, the shock was too great. It was like the end of the world and what can anyone say when the world ends? There are no words invented to describe the impact of such a catastrophe, and there is no self left to pronounce them. As Ariadne stood there amidst the charred ruins of what used to be her world, she heard a voice calling to her. It was the sweet voice of an angel calling her towards him, towards sleep. Her eyelids felt unbearably heavy as she groped her way against the wall towards the voice, the sweet singing voice.

*According to these memories
I'm just mad about you
I'm just mad about you...*

Ariadne began to sing along with the familiar refrain. Where had she heard it before? She wasn't sure but singing along with the voice warmed her up inside, made her feel safe and contented. It made all bad things disappear: Medea, the guitar case, the walls of the apartment which she was crawling along. All that was left was her and the voice, floating in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by red, soft clouds. She moved blindly through the thick mist until she came upon the source of the heavenly sound. It was coming from the mouth of her lover, who lay peacefully on a cloud, his eyes closed, his wings spread out to either side of his body. Through her half-closed eyes she admired his long lashes lying against his smooth cheeks, the curl of a smile at the edges of his lips. And his heavenly voice kept calling her to him; he was singing to her alone. Like in the very beginning, only the two of them existed, everything before, between and after was erased, lost in the opaque redness. She climbed onto the cloud and nestled her head between his chin and shoulder, singing along with him in perfect harmony.

*But I was naked, I was afraid
to have my feelings displayed
but now it comes to this
I will deliberately miss you...*

His eyes popped open and he turned them on her. But they were not the soft, brown eyes that she remembered, they were shocking red coals, demon's eyes. The next moment his wings burst into flames and he pushed her off the red cloud. She plummeted down, down, down, a bottomless fall with nothing to grab onto to stop it. And as she fell, his voice followed her, now sinister, now mocking, accompanied by a chorus made up of bats and rats and those who feed upon them.

*Some will pay
for what others
pay to avoid*

From then on there would be the sensation of falling and nothing more.

50.

- 5. It is not true that the panoramic view of Medea's House of Pain is the last photograph. There is one more picture—an epilogue to the series. It is a Polaroid, its colours garish, its paper thick and unbendable, its composition rash, thoughtless, capturing whatever it can in its swath. In this final photo, Ariadne sits on the stoop in front of the Vissinos' apartment building. Her hands are wrapped tightly around herself as if to keep her body from falling to pieces. She stares ahead listlessly at nothing at all. Through the building's tinted glass doors we see the silhouette of a man on his way out. It is not possible to discern who the man might be as he is no more than a vague shape, a shadow. He could be one of the building's many tenants taking a trip to the corner kiosk for a pack of cigarettes or to make a phone call. Or

he might be the mysterious rat killer from photo number three, following Ariadne for reasons which are not entirely clear or rational. But the shadow is neither one nor the other. Who could it be besides the man this next scene would be impossible without?

Yannis pushed the door open and walked past Ariadne without acknowledging her. He stiffened his neck to keep himself from looking back. He was afraid of gazing upon the damage he had done, though he would never admit this. He marched past her towards the street, but in her listlessness Ariadne didn't notice him, smell him, feel his presence immediately. When his afterimage finally penetrated her haze, she scrambled to her feet and chased him. Yannis shuddered as she approached, feeling her hot breath on his neck and the weight of her hand on his shoulder before she even touched him. He swung around and dealt the first blow before Ariadne had a chance to speak.

"What the fuck are you doing here? What do you want from me?" Ariadne took a step back and wiped his spittle from her face.

"I need to..." she whispered, the strength draining from her voice with every word until there was nothing coming out of her mouth but laboured breath. "I need to talk to you," she tried again. "Just for a little while. Can we just talk?" Her eyes shot back and forth, afraid to rest on his. Her hands shook and she doubled over and retched, holding onto her stomach for a moment then straightening up and taking several short breaths. "I need something from you. Something only you can give me." She grabbed his arm and he immediately shook himself loose.

"I've got nothing for you, do you understand? Nothing." He tried to avoid her eyes, but was momentarily drawn into their desperation. In them he saw himself in double, making him hate her even more. "What's the matter with you anyway?" He felt a gnawing pain in his gut and his hands began to shake. "You on something, baby? You

find someone else to smack you around? If you'd made the decision earlier, I wouldn't have had to leave so soon."

"Don't leave me, please don't leave me. I'll die, I'm dying without you. Can't you see?" She was on her knees now, squinting up into his scornful eyes. He laughed maliciously and stretched her left eye open with his fingers. He traced the pinpoint pupil with his fingernail, followed the cracked highways in her bloodshot whites. When he made as if to poke her eye with his extended finger, Ariadne did not blink.

"It's too late, baby. I've already left you." He wiped his hands on his jeans. "I've found someone better than you, someone who won't hold me back. You were nothing but dead weight from the day I met you. You're already dead. Someone should bury you before you start to stink." He pushed her head back, then walked away. Ariadne ran after him.

"You can't leave me like this. You made promises. You proposed and we were going to New York and London, remember? Come on, Yannaki, let's leave today." There was a crazed light in her eye, and he saw that she could snap at any moment, pull out a knife and kill him on the spot, then feast upon his eyes like olives.

"You worthless piece of trash. Why would I go anywhere with you? You'll never accomplish anything on your own. You're a loser, *xeneroti*, no matter how much stuff you take. I'm smart enough to abandon a sinking ship."

"Can I have a kiss then," she begged. "Just one last kiss and then I'll leave you alone, I promise. I'll never bother you again. Just one kiss." Her lips trembled and her teeth began to chatter. "Please, just one..."

"You make me sick," he drawled and walked away, leaving her in the rubble of her personal earthquake. He turned back one last time and, in a voice dripping with spite, called out for all to hear, "Don't bring your ugly face around here anymore. I can't stand to look at you. It makes my stomach turn. May our paths never cross again." He then disappeared around the corner as a churchbell chimed balefully in a nearby square,

and Ariadne crumbled like an ancient ruin in the crepuscular light of her abandonment before being blown away by a meaningless wind.

51.

What did the daughter of Minos feel when she woke up that morning on that foreign shore so far from the place she called home? Did she sigh as she stretched her royal limbs in the warm, white sand, pressing a grainy Siren, wings fanned out, beneath her? Did she scream out in fright when she reached out to touch the soft hair of her lover, for whom she had sacrificed everything, and felt nothing but sand between her fingers?

Her first thought might have been that he had gone for a walk along the white beach that curled like a snake to the far end of the island. She didn't budge from her spot, waiting for him where he'd left her. She didn't want him to come back and become alarmed at her absence. She pulled her knees to her chest and buried her toes in the warm sand. She sat there all morning looking out towards the horizon where her former life lay buried in the rubble of Knossos. In this new life, on this strange island, she could be a woman instead of a priestess, a princess, someone's daughter. She was now free to walk the village hand in hand with the man she loved, to dance, to live without fear of her father's punishment. If she didn't love Theseus so, she might be angry at him for forgetting about her, leaving her hungry on this abandoned beach the entire morning without a single thing to amuse her. But how she adored him, the smoothness of his muscles, the loose blonde curls that dusted his strong shoulders, that fell into his fathomless blue eyes. There wasn't a Cretan woman alive who would not have betrayed her husband for a strand of Theseus' golden hair, for a passing glance directed her way. But she, Ariadne of Crete, was the favoured one, the woman whose fate was linked with his, who was destined from the very beginning to sail away with the hero, to bear his

love and his children, to follow him to the end of the earth to this island, where all at once, anything was possible. Ariadne caressed the imprint his body left in the sand where he had lain next to her all night, holding her against him. She blushed at the memory of his touch.

As the sun travelled its immutable route across the sky, other thoughts, less pleasant, began to trouble the young woman. Thoughts of enemies from her father's kingdom in Crete arriving on fast-sailing ships and snatching her love from her warm embrace in the middle of the night as she slept on oblivious, drunk with wine and pleasure. Had they stripped the flesh from his lithe body before throwing him into the sea for the crime of stealing her, the goddess on earth, from her exalted shrine? This thought filled Ariadne with despair, and she cried in agony for the loss of him until her tears dug rivers in the sand and then ran into the sea and drowned. The sun kept travelling further and further below the horizon, beyond which her ruined life lay.

In a moment of optimism, brought on by the sight of a young man walking towards her on the beach, Ariadne slapped her own wrist for having allowed herself such gloomy thoughts. There was her prince, coming back for her, juggling three pomegranates like a carnival clown. She was such a silly princess. The Cretan soldiers would not have taken him and left her behind if it was for her honour that they had come.

"Crete," Theseus told her as they had boarded the ship for their journey to this island, "is dead. We will never return to its shores because after we've left, it will no longer exist."

"You are my country now," she replied as the ship crossed the horizon's line and all she had known disappeared.

When the young man approached, Ariadne's heart sank, for this was not her lover Theseus but a youth from the island who smiled lasciviously as he tossed her the plump red fruit hoping that she would move her folded arms away from her naked

breasts to catch it. She let the fruit fall to the sand and only picked it up after the young man was well out of sight on the deserted beach. She ate the pomegranate lustily, stripping the ruby flesh of the seeds away from their bitter, yellow center with her sharp teeth, spitting the offensive particles onto the sand.

Night fell and Ariadne's mood darkened as truth cast its shadow over her like death. She lay down on the sand and prayed to rosy-fingered Eos, mother of the winds, to send her sons to inter her, bury her so deep that there would be no evidence that anyone had ever passed the place where she lay. A light breeze was dispatched in response to her prayers. She then reached for the small pouch Efosini had given her, inserted a finger between its drawstrings, and smeared her lips, her gums and her tongue with its corrosive white powder. Virulent blisters burst from her skin, sealing her lips together and filling her mouth so that no scream could escape from the belly of timelessness where the powder had transported her. When she awoke next, days later, it wasn't until sleep's hangover had cleared from her temples that the nightmare took shape again before her eyes. She quickly emptied the remaining powder into her parched mouth, and prayed that this time there would be no memory, no return. But such was not her fate.

It was night time when she opened her eyes again. The moon beamed compassionately above her and a hint of hyacinth was carried on the warm sea breeze. From up in the hills the sounds of singing and laughter, the beating of drums and tambourines reached her on the beach. When she looked up towards the commotion she saw torch flames spitting at the sky in the distance and she took heart. A small procession of villagers wearing coloured robes and braided wreaths of myrtle and lavender around their arms, waists and heads were parading down to the beach to greet her. Cruel hope twisted her heart once again. Theseus was returning for her, hope lied, having informed the villagers of the identity of the black-eyed spark who had danced with abandon at their carnival, throwing off her royal robes and pulling the effigy of the

harvest king apart with her delicate fingers, tearing him apart with her teeth like a wild boar. It was their yearly custom to kill the king, to sew him in with the crops, and Ariadne had embraced the tradition as her own since this was to be her new home. The villagers were now coming to honour her and she rose to receive them. She forgave him, she forgave him everything.

As they approached, she looked through the torch light from face to face for her Theseus, her love, and again she was seized with fear when she did not find him among the crowd.

"Where is Theseus?" she demanded.

"I am Theseus," a fleshy brute with a wiry black beard announced and planted his torch in the sand through the heart of her lover's imprint.

"No, I am Theseus," claimed a second fellow, followed by a third, and a fourth as they caged her in with their torches.

The first Theseus stepped into the ring with his hands stretched out before him and a dirty grin on his bristly face. Other hands reached in between the torches, grabbing and taunting Ariadne as she ran in circles trying to escape the leering barbarian.

"Where is Theseus," she shrieked. "I am to be his wife and you will pay sorely for your disrespect."

"I am Theseus," the chorus replied.

"And what a fine wife you will make, my princess," one man yelled out, and the others cackled and snorted as she kept running, swatting away hairy-knuckled, thick-fingered hands from her body.

While her captors were blinded with the tears of their ugly laughter, Ariadne managed to slip by them, pounding her way towards the water and offering herself to the waves. When they noticed that their prize had escaped, a dozen men chased after her like dogs, paddling deep into the sea and howling, the sea filling their slack mouths with salt, taking some of them under. Those who were spared kept searching, holding

their torches high above their heads, but could not see Ariadne in the oily blackness because she was forcing her head under water, swallowing the sea as it swallowed her. The scavengers cursed and threatened and beseeched their barbarous gods to give her back, and those on the shore joined in the appeal.

A gust of wind extinguished the torches and a roar of thunder silenced the throng. A bolt of lightning fell from the cloudless sky, splitting the sea open into two vertical waves and taking the rest of the men to their watery graves. In the light of the full moon the villagers on the shore saw a figure emerging from the swell, a colossus bigger than the tallest statue in Delphi, carrying the body of the daughter of Minos in his immense arms. When he set her body on the shore, Ariadne did not dare to stand or even to look up at him, but fell to her knees in awe, prostrating herself before the great Poseidon Earthshaker, king of all beneath the waters.

"Where is Theseus," she whispered as the god stared down at her, the ground shaking beneath her body.

"I am Theseus," a sniggering drunk called out.

"Silence," Poseidon bellowed, "or I shall turn you all into eels." The villagers cowered.

"Ariadne of Crete, daughter of Minos, stand up and hear your fate," the god commanded, and the trembling girl obeyed. "My son, Theseus, took sail six days ago before the sun rose to claim his throne in Athens. He will take your sister, Phaedra, as his bride. You, Ariadne of Crete, daughter of Minos, are to remain here as the consort of my brother Dionysus." Poseidon untangled a strand of seaweed from his hair and wrapped it around Ariadne's forehead like a crown. The salt water that dripped from it stung her eyes.

The god's proclamation sank in slowly, more slowly than the shock that made Ariadne collapse onto her knees once more. She dropped her forehead to the sand and squealed as if she had been split open with an ax. She, the betrayer of her people, the

princess of a lost and dead land, had been betrayed by her lover and her most precious sister, whom she had doted upon since childhood, in whom she had confided her forbidden passion for the handsome Athenian.

"Lift your head, ungrateful wretch. You are the betrothed of a god." In his rage a green light flashed out of Poseidon's eyes, and a punishing wind whipped Ariadne mercilessly with sand. She looked up into the eyes of the raging god.

"Kill me," she begged. "I have no will left to live."

The god took her there where she lay crouched in the sand between the smouldering torches, brutally, from the front then from the back, like an animal. There were no soft caresses, no kisses upon her eyelids and her mouth, just a violent, relentless invasion as the crowd cheered and shouted obscenities.

When he had filled her with his sea, he left her bloated body for the vultures and returned to the folds of his watery kingdom. The villagers carried Ariadne's limp body up the hill to the village, and one after another they entered her like the god, each echoing, "I am Theseus. I am Theseus," before pushing their way through her battered gates.

"And I am dead," Ariadne responded every time. "I am killed."

52.

Within three days of her abandonment, Ariadne was on her way to the island she had visited the summer before. She packed her belongings in the same worn suitcases she had so enthusiastically filled with the objects that defined her when she'd left Montreal full of pluck. She locked up her small apartment with its white marble floors and its view of Piraeus, like a tomb or the scene of a violent crime. And she boarded a ferry, ironically named after her, for the twelve-hour trip to Nysas—via Naxos—where she would start a new life or at least try to blot out the old one.

Where she found the energy and the clarity of mind to remove herself from Athens so quickly and efficiently after her demise remains one of those mysteries surrounding the will to live and its powers of rejuvenation—otherwise known as running on empty. Something kicked in, like a generator in a power failure, and Ariadne (or whatever had taken over her authority) managed to contact Alik and Thanasis at the exact right moment, just before they sailed away with someone else's name in their pocket. Some might clearly detect the meddling hand of fate once again in these events and their impeccable timing: the job at The Scat, the availability of a boat to Nysas the next morning, the arrival of Yannis at her door just as she was closing off the last light in her little apartment. For, of course, it was just like him to come back, head hung low, tail between his skinny legs, full of remorse.

Ariadne turned towards him and stared blankly for a few seconds, unsure of who he was. She then turned her back to him and tried the knob to make sure the door was locked. Yannis stood behind her, lanky and impotent. His bones hung together loosely and threatened to fall into a neat pile on the floor at any moment and spontaneously combust, leaving nothing of him but a small pile of smouldering ash. Ariadne pressed the elevator's button and waited patiently without acknowledging the ashen-faced stranger who breathed his cold, rank breath on her neck.

"Where are you going, Ariaki?" Yannis croaked, his voice straining with false levity and the gurgle of tears. Ariadne didn't respond. Who was this man who knew her former name? In the land of the dead there were no names, and even the sound of her own surprised her.

He reached for the handle of her suitcase, but did not have the strength to lift the bag. "Let's go inside and talk for a little while, like the old days. Remember how we used to stay up all night and talk?" Ariadne slid the suitcase closer to her, swatted his fingers away from the handle. "I brought you a present." He reached into his leather

jacket and pulled out a gold, hand-held mirror, then held it up to her face. "For you, my love, so you can watch how much more beautiful you grow each day."

Ariadne thought she recognized the mirror, but where had she seen it before? Maybe in a dream or a movie set in France. And who was that wretched girl who stared back at her from it? Poor thing, she looked as though she had survived a cataclysm. She turned towards the stranger and that same part of her that was still in control picked up the heavy mirror between the tips of two fingers and let it drop to the marble floor of the hallway, smashing it into a thousand brutal tears. "Off with her head," she said quietly, then laughed at her joke, though she wasn't sure why she had said it. He stared at the broken mirror in disbelief and started to cry.

"Look, I'm sorry about the other night. I love you. Wherever you're going, don't go. Please stay with me. I can't live without you." He fell to his knees and began gathering the bits of broken glass, pricking the tips of his fingers, the skin of his palms on their edges.

"Who are you?" Ariadne asked in all seriousness, then stepped into the elevator, which had finally made its way up to the fifth floor. He scrambled in after her, his hands bleeding like a stigmatic's, dripping perfect round puddles onto the elevator floor as it began its slow and painful descent.

"I know I don't deserve you, my love, but pity me. Look how I bleed for you." He held his bloody hands out towards her face, and she screamed as if Charon himself had finally cornered her, had come to take that last part of her that still, somehow, survived. The scream travelled up the elevator's shaft, waking the building's tenants out of their siesta slumber, shaking them out of their mediocre, middle-class dreams.

"Please say something," he begged. "You can't leave me like this. Where will I find you? Say something, anything, please." His hands swung at his sides and as the blood drained out of them, he seemed to shrink, taking up less and less room in the elevator.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I am leaving because I have somewhere else to be. It's the reason most people leave."

"Then take me with you." He blocked the elevator door with his body.

"There is no place for anyone else where I'm going."

"Where?" he pleaded, "Where are you going, my light?"

"Hell," she replied calmly. "I am going to hell."

The elevator rested on the first floor with a thump followed by a shudder. Ariadne picked up her suitcase and pushed past him. He followed like a gosling crossing the highway.

"I know you're mad at me, Ariaki, but I didn't mean any of it. It was just that I needed a fix so I went down to the dog house, and she said she wanted some, too, and then she kept paying... If you were a junkie, you'd understand. Everything between us would've been different."

Ariadne turned her empty eyes towards him. There was something she recognized in his face, so thin and drawn. It wouldn't be long now, she thought. Soon it would be all over. "I was a junkie," she replied. "But I died. May you die soon and be released from your misery." She rested her suitcase on the sidewalk and waited for the taxi she had asked the owner of the corner store to summon for her earlier that day. She saw it rolling slowly down the street and waved it over.

"I'll die without you. I'm sorry. I love you." He put his arms around her and, pitying him, she held him stiffly for a moment then extricated herself from his embrace.

"Our paths will never cross again," she stated bluntly, then turned her attention to the cab driver, indicating that the trunk should be opened. He came around and lifted her suitcase into the back.

"What have you got in here, rocks?" the cabby complained.

"A dead body," she replied, then slipped into the back seat, leaving Yannis standing on the sidewalk like an urchin, his bloodied hands held out for the offerings that would keep him alive.

It wasn't until she boarded the ferry, found a place inside its belly where she could lie down to await her passing, that it all started coming back to her, now that fate, or whatever had taken charge of her actions, had dutifully carried her away from Athenian shores. She ran out onto the deck and hung her body over the railing, stretching her arms towards the now-distant port of Piraeus, shrieking his name as the brisk wind and the cool sea air revived that part of her that had closed in on itself, that had clenched like a fist inside her chest.

She had one leg over the side before two of the ferry's employees grabbed her, carried her to the infirmary kicking and scratching, and injected her with a tranquilizer that knocked her out for the rest of the trip.

That her body arrived on Nysas without further mishap, though a little queasy from the voyage and still groggy from the tranquilizer, there is no doubt. But part of her made it over the railing, and in her dreams she splashed in the dark blue waters and swam desperately towards the shore, still calling his name.

The ferry arrived late and there was no one to welcome her at the island's port when she went ashore, no one to wave or ask her about the comfort of the voyage. Ariadne walked trance-like past the hawkers of rooms—sleepy old ladies in hairnets, flowered aprons and black slippers chasing after snickering teenagers with cookies and fruit. She headed towards the port's long and lonely beach, shunned by all despite its thick, soft sand and its subtle arching grace. It is on this beach that Ariadne spent her first night because the bus had stopped running and the road to the village disappeared under the spell of night. When she woke up at dawn she was encircled by a pack of

wild dogs, sniffing her and burying her under a thin and uneven layer of sand. Other dogs, less concerned with her presence on their beach, stretched out by the shoreline, sphinxlike, letting the cool, clear morning water lap somnolently over their outstretched paws. She brushed the sand out of her eyes and began the slow climb to the village alone, dragging her body up the hill, her baggage behind her, while her spirit, her soul, remained lost at sea.

Section VII

53.

As suddenly as the island was plunged into infernal darkness, the lights come back on and a collective cry of relief shoots up into the clearing sky, pushing off the last lingering storm clouds like unwanted guests. The bar owners and the tourists, who trembled in dark corners during the blackout, hug, kiss and grope, as pleased to find each other alive and well as long lost relatives reunited after a shipwreck or a long, brutal war. The blackout is not seen by these people as a freak occurrence caused simply by inclement weather, but as a signifier of the end of the world as they know it. Any loose thread in the fabric of island habit is unwelcome, even by those who have only been here for a few days. In the darkness and the fecund silence, all who came to Nysas seeking distraction—the national and international bar roaches, the beach bunnies and the backgammon boys—had time to think, and thinking is the opposite of pleasure, their *raison d'être*. Thus, the power failure sapped them of their vigour, temporarily nullifying their existence.

Down at Anthemusa, existence is more than temporarily nullified for the storm's casualties—the victims of gods and sirens, buried in sand to stave off nature's flesh eaters who have come in droves prepared for a feast. And what a feast it is: more than a dozen bloated bodies marinated in ouzo and retsina, cooking in the hot sand like lamb and chicken-stuffed camels, the culinary specialty of the Tuareg of West Africa.

A Greek film crew that arrived earlier in the day is busily recording the tragedy to include in their film—an arty black and white feature about a man who goes mad while trying to find himself on an island he visited in his youth. The unexpected scene at Anthemusa will be inserted as a dream sequence, a premonition the madman has while

still sane. It will be the first sign of his failing faculties, and the first clue to the viewer that all is not as it seems, that beneath the man's serene and charming facade lies stink and rot. If they watch him closely, all of his wounds, his festering sores, will begin to weep, staining his well-cut clothes with their corrosion.

An assistant is overheard telling a lackey (the difference in title based on seniority and the total weight of furniture each is required to move in a day) how such an epic scene, including helicopters whirring overhead and screaming, naked women throwing themselves on the burial mounds of their drowned lovers, is far beyond their film's meager budget. They would be fools not to take full advantage of this gift from the gods, which will probably end up being the most disturbing and exacting scene in the entire film. "You can't make shit like that up," the lackey adds, nodding to himself while patting a little more sand on one of the corpses.

Had the film's young director thought to come to Nysas a few weeks earlier, he could have shot a documentary of the island's goings-on and called it fiction. No one would believe it possible, no imagination could conjure that which was ultimately debauchery of mythological proportions, in the same way that no painter has ever succeeded in precisely capturing the brilliant shifting colours of the sky. And all this archetypal mayhem was available to anyone with the price of a boat ticket, some time to kill, something to run from, and the will to be swept away without knowing where you'll land. The Norwegian theater director, the French pornographer, Julian, Daniel, Rut, Ariadne and all the rest were drawn to Nysas specifically for abandon, though each and every visitor lived it in his or her own way, suffering consequences specific to his or her fate.

After shooting the tragedy from all possible angles, the crew pays several villagers a paltry sum for the use of their donkeys. Like the wise men of another myth, or the merchants of dreams, the crew slowly ascends the dirt road from Anthemusa

dark corners, shards of glass painted over at the foot of the bar, and the dust that has embedded itself permanently in Thanasis' frown lines—things better off hidden from too close scrutiny.

Theseus shakes his head, folds his arms over his chest. This place is a disaster in the light. Even the customers trickling in are all wrong. Some of them have obviously heard of the film shoot and put on sunglasses as they cross the bar's threshold, stamping the night's first dirty footprints onto the white circles by the door. Theseus paces from the inner room to the outer room, wondering what to do. He stops briefly before the cracked, oval mirror with its carved wooden frame which hangs in the passageway between the two rooms, and for a moment doesn't recognize the person staring back at him.

Thanasis, shrinking behind the bar, shrivelling in the light, wrings his hands as he watches the director inspecting the bar. He reaches for a drink from behind the Virgin Mary and throws it back in one gulp, then grabs his throat and retches. Someone has refilled his bottle of 60 year old scotch with turpentine, the same brand of poison he guiltlessly sells to his fair-weather friends every night. Ariadne, that fucking Ariadne. When she comes in he'll fire her. No he'll wait until the end of the fucking night, after the fucking film crew packs their fucking equipment and leaves him in peace, in the dark. If only he could ask them to leave right now, call the whole thing off. He pulls out the wad of bills they paid him for the privilege of using his bar in their film, in addition to the promise of free publicity—The Scat's name and locale in the closing credits, then stuffs the bills back into his pocket.

Theseus approaches Thanasis and tells him they are ready to start. Thanasis tries to stall, suggesting they wait for Ariadne. She won't be necessary, Theseus replies, and time is short. The crew has to pack up and sail off to the next location—a ghost island closer to Turkey than Greece, which is regularly patrolled by the Greek navy. Its bombed out houses and its abandoned square will be in the film's final scene,

towards the village, their equipment strapped to the backs of the tired animals and swaying perilously from side to side. "Someone should film this," cries Theseus, the film's director. "History in the making," he declares like an avenging prince ready to storm the gates of the palace and trying to stir his troops. "Beware of Greek-bearing donkeys." He laughs at his own joke as he digs the heels of his cowboy boots into the animal's side and trots ahead of the pack. "Come on, boys. Action!" But not one member of the crew, tired as donkeys, volunteers to run uphill alongside the caravan, forsaking his place in the story. "Let someone else record," the assistant director calls out. "For once I want to be part of it. It's much easier that way."

The unhurried procession, unrecorded, makes its way up the narrow paths of the village, the rented donkeys leaving a trail of golden-brown markers at regular intervals for the crew members to find their way back to where they started. Their next location is The Scat Club, and as they park their donkeys outside its entrance, the former stable seems for a moment to regain its long-lost identity. One of the asses (the animals, not the crew) tries to push its way through the wooden doors, but is repelled by a blast of music. It is business as usual for Thanasis now that the lights have come back on. He greets Theseus and curses Ariadne in the same breath, making no connection between the names, though the coincidence is not lost on the director.

"I have come to reclaim my bride," he jokes when he hears her name, though a slight shiver runs up his spine. Thanasis, in no mood for jokes, replies bitterly, "You can have her, the little bitch. Unreliable as a whore's period."

Where is Ariadne, that no-account slut? It is already nine o'clock and she will be in big trouble if she doesn't show up in the next ten, no five minutes, Thanasis seethes silently. He'll give her five minutes, then he'll put out a call for her head on a platter. How dare she leave him alone with the customers, and now this pesky film crew who are setting up bright lights in every corner of the bar, hot as sun lamps, as if they didn't have enough sun during the day. Worst of all, the lights illuminate cobwebs in formerly

symbolizing the death of the man and of mankind itself in the aftermath of the storm; the stark remains of disaster, the fate of a civilization that has lost its soul. (*Or something like that.*) And anyway, he has changed his mind about the scene in The Scat Club. He orders the lackeys to move all the lights into the front room and to point them at the floor. All he is interested in are feet. All he wants to see are the perfect white circles slowly disappearing as customer after customer treads dirt in from outside. Now there is a metaphor, he says to Thanasis and the assistant director. "Leave the metaphors to writers," the a.d. replies, then asks Theseus if he wants one of the lackeys to sweep the floor before they start.

Thanasis comes out from behind the bar, ready to throw Theseus and his crew out, for what type of publicity will the floor bring him? He doesn't see the beauty in the circles, to him it is just a floor, and an inconvenient one at that. But the bulge in his pants (the wad of bills, nothing more significant) convinces him to play along. "The floor is painted," Thanasis informs them curtly. "Every night after we close, Ariadne paints the floor." "Perfect, my friend," Theseus cries out, slapping Thanasis on the back. They might even stay until closing to film this weird act of renewal. He begins hoping that the elusive Ariadne will appear, though another part deep down hopes she will not.

The cameraman begins shooting passing feet, and Thanasis slinks back behind the bar and bangs on the ceiling with a broomstick to summon Alik. She runs down filled with panic, leaving the No Problem attended by the cook, who pours free drinks for the staff and all the customers. The storm has perked up the No Problem's downtrodden employees, has jolted them out of their lethargic servitude, and has provided a temporary escape hatch from which they have all emerged renewed. They feel like themselves once more: independent, young creatures. And they see Nysas for what it is: a brief stop in their travels instead of the lifelong sentence for undisclosed crimes that their sour employers have convinced them they are serving.

Thanasis orders Alikì to immediately begin waiting on tables. She wraps her bony fingers around half a dozen cocktail glasses that are sitting on the bar and carries them to the tables like Death delivering goblets filled with doom. Her big, awkward feet trip over the short, rush-bottomed stools, and Orgasms, French Kisses, and Catcalls slop out of the glasses and into the horrified customers' laps. Theseus grimaces at Alikì's flat ugliness, glad he decided upon the floor. "It's like hell in here," he whispers to the a.d., who nods in agreement. "Someone hand me a piece of string," Theseus continues. "Ariadne!" he calls out the door, his voice echoing through the village. "Ariadne!" lost in the noise and discord of the island's fever.

54.

It is perfectly still in Ariadne's room, eerily still, too still. Not even a breath can be heard, the snuffling of sleep, the yelp of a bad dream. Karina calls Ariadne's name through the door, tries to peer into the dark room through an opening in the curtain, but can see nothing. Word reached Karina too late that her friend has a visitor, someone who should not be here, someone back from the dead and better off long forgotten. The thought makes Karina's stomach ache. She has come to see if Ariadne needs help or, more specifically, rescue. Karina knocks on the door three times, first tentatively, then with mounting urgency. She calls Ariadne's name once more, then reaches for the knob and finds the door uncharacteristically unlocked.

When they first settled into Kyr Georgis' house, neither she nor Ariadne bothered locking their doors. But then things started disappearing: lacy underclothes, tubes of lipstick, drachma bills stashed in secret compartments—under mattresses, between the pages of trashy novels. Both women suspected Kyr Georgis' daughter, Fofo, of this petty thievery, but decided to let it slide and started locking their doors instead. Even if she were guilty, it was certain that Kyr Georgis would throw both tenants out, just to

save face. And they didn't even want to think about what he would do to poor Fofo. It also occurred to them that Kyr Georgis himself might have been the culprit, but that was as far as they were willing to imagine, since some of the thefts apparently took place while the girls were asleep.

Karina pokes her head in first, whispers Ariadne's name into the void. When she gets no response, she steps into the room, gently closing the door behind her, unwilling to disturb the spirit of silence. Something smells foul, like a dead mouse or rotting broccoli, and a pin-prickling cold on her nape recommends that she flee. But now that Karina has crossed the line, there is no turning back; she has to face whatever lies before her, silent, motionless and black as squid's ink. She gropes along the rough walls and almost trips. Her foot kicks a small, metal object under the bed. She hears it hit the concrete wall the bed is pushed up against. As her eyes begin to adjust to the lightlessness, she can make out a shape under the covers of Ariadne's bed. Karina clicks her tongue. Imagine sleeping through your only evening off in months; that would be a crime. Ariadne would never forgive her if she didn't at least try to wake her up.

It is a beautiful night now that the storm has cleared. The moon is almost full and hanging low, its burnt orange colour giving everything within its radius a warm glow, like happiness. Karina heard that there was some sort of trouble down at Anthemusa, but there is always some sort of trouble at Anthemusa this time of year. The helicopters hovering above the island have become as common as gulls, their begging easily ignored. Outside the house, Karina hears agitated voices and the ringing of bells. Then there is shouting and the donkeys bray as if they are being beaten to death. But these sounds are also easily disregarded. Nothing out of the ordinary, really. When chaos is constant, it is peace that makes an impression, like the peace in the room, heavy as lead.

Karina kneels next to the bed. "Ariaki," she whispers, leaning in close to the body, wrapped tightly as a mummy. "Let's go for a walk, *het is moie weer*— it is beautiful weather." She pronounces her few words of Dutch proudly. Rut taught them to her to

charm his compatriots. How she liked that Rut. Ariadne is such a dolt letting that one go.

"Ariaki. Wake up." But there is no response, no movement and Karina begins to worry. Did that bastard shoot something into her? She knows all about his tranquilizers and devil's powder. Karina reaches out and grabs her friend's shoulder, but immediately lets go as if she's been burned. The icy coldness of the skin through the fabric stings as sharply as a candle flame. Karina gasps and falls back onto the floor. A sob escapes into the darkness, and for a few moments after that Karina can't move, can't scream, can't utter a word from the shock. She can feel the matchbox tucked in her pocket scraping against her thigh, but is afraid to reach for it, afraid to shed light on the horror that is laid out before her. Another part of her is compelled to look, to witness, to confirm, and with shaking hand she strikes a wooden match against the floor and inches closer to the stillness that her friend has become. "I'll kill him, Ariadne," Karina vows, regaining her voice with a squeak. "If it's the last thing I do, I'll kill him with my own two hands for what he's done to you."

She reaches out a second time, wrapping her hand in the blanket for protection, and pulls the body towards her, turns it over so that the glassy eyes fix upon the ceiling. She holds her breath against its putrescence, which has abruptly become overwhelming, and leans over the face, her brows in a knot. For a moment she does not understand what she sees. She stares dumbly while her sentiments scramble to readjust. For before her lies the lifeless body not of her friend Ariadne, but of the man whose reputation has always preceded him— in the bars of Athens, on Nysas, and in this room. Yannis, his face already grey with the final abandonment of death, the corners of his mouth pinched into a hideous frown.

The match shrinks, burning the tips of Karina's fingers as it expires. As if this is her cue, she jumps to her feet and runs out onto the balcony, slamming the door to Ariadne's room behind her. She has never seen a dead body before and is shocked to

discover how little she feels for the corpse, and how easily she could get trapped by its fascination. If it had been anyone but Yannis, she might have put her ear to his chest to see just how quiet things could get, her cheek against his, her mouth to his mouth, pretending he were her dead lover. But she's never liked Yannis, though this is the first time they've actually met. Karina looks out towards the sea at the infamous view that Ariadne offers all her transient lovers and wonders whether Yannis stood there with her friend as the rain clouds cleared and the sky was replenished with stars. She doubts it. That bastard was here for trouble, not love, she saw it written all over his cold face.

It is then that Karina smells the smoke. In the distance she sees the silhouettes of donkeys loaded down with buckets of sloshing water. The animal's rumps are being whipped with willow switches by shadowy old ladies, while other old ladies carry their own buckets in hands clasped in prayer as they make their way to the highest point of the island. *Agia Irini's* bells ring desperately, imploring the villagers to move as quickly as they can. Karina looks up at the hill and sees the white church, the crown of Nysas, swallowed by flame. Above it hangs a cloud of black smoke with the height and wingspan of an angel.

Enthralled by the flames shooting up into the heavens like fireworks, Karina's mind buries Yannis, mislays Ariadne. She reaches for the earring she is wearing and fingers it idly, its discovery bringing her back to her senses. She had borrowed, without asking, Ariadne's favourite earring, her talisman, a three-pronged silver fork, its skeleton fingers stretching out towards Karina's shoulder to get her attention. She disallows herself any feelings of guilt, despite the circumstances.

Where is Ariadne? She has to find her immediately, while everyone else is preoccupied with the fire. There is no question of going to the idiot police about the body, better to just get rid of it. No one will miss him. Men like that don't have mothers or friends, do they? She has to think fast. She has to find Petros. She has to find Ariadne and help her escape. One thing at a time. But where is Ariadne?

55.

The sea is slick and still as oil. The moon's deep orange light is sucked below the water's surface as soon as it touches it, drowning. Down past the port, on the other side of the island, the ringing bells, the shouting, the general pandemonium cannot be heard. It is as if the sounds charge towards this place, then lose momentum and dissipate into silence, surrendering to it unconditionally. It is a warm night, despite the storm, and thousands of stars blink in the sky, the eyes of anxious gods looking over what they have created.

Ariadne lies stretched out like a sacrifice on Daniel's flat rock, drugged by the deepest sleep. She is motionless as the oily water, dead still, except for the occasional spasm which shakes off the tension bunched up in her limbs. The orange moon casts its faint light on Ariadne's face and she looks serene, all the edges smoothed out and soft, her mouth curled into a girlish grin. Once or twice a hysterical laugh, like the caw of a crow, escapes her lips, startling a small flock of white sea birds who circle her ceremoniously. Only one part of Ariadne's body is not relaxed. Her arms are flung behind her head, and her hands grasp the rock's sheared edge so tightly that her knuckles seemed to glow white in the dark. Droplets of blood from her fingertips quietly plunk into the sea, attracting multi-coloured jellyfish disguised as flowers with mucousy petals, and invisible black waterbugs that can see in the dark.

Things, the gods admit sheepishly as they watch from above, have not gone exactly as they'd planned. The odds had been against Ariadne, and those who laid wagers grudgingly hand over their losses: a collection of cliffs in Northern Greece, a sacred spring in Delphi, a favourite stag—mementos of ancient conquests and personal

myth exchanging hands like stories and snapshots as the losers smilingly plot revenge. One thing is certain: the gods are poor sports.

One god, perturbed by the outcome, puts forth a suggestion to the assembly. They must retrace their steps and find out where their plan for this uncooperative daughter went awry. This was not the type of thing they could take lightly; in the old days the will of the gods always prevailed. Could the young woman's escape from the ancient narrative be part of a trend? It was of utmost importance to find out where the infallible ones had (gods forbid) failed. What would the world come to if mortals began to challenge them? And of greater consequence, what would the immortals do for entertainment?

The first god stands up, swelling to his maximum height. "The plan was terribly simple," he begins. "Ariadne was to learn proper respect for us."

"That wasn't the plan," a second interjects, as the others murmur in accord. "That was a side effect. The plan was to show Ariadne that love and death are inseparable, and that every time you fall in love you must be prepared to die." The assembly boos and heckles until the second god sits back down looking hurt.

"How deep," a third pronounces sarcastically. "I thought the plan was to teach her that the old country is located inside her. That its powers and poisons will course through her veins no matter how much she denies it, how far she flies, and how long it takes her to come back. The fate of Greekness is inescapable."

This too is met with by a chorus of, "That wasn't it, nimrod," and "Who asked you?" and, "Strong like hero, smart like ass."

Now the gods are jumping up and down ingloriously, calling out their own versions of the story and its moral, drowning each other out with their squawking.

"Say no to drugs."

"Love conquers all."

"Sleep with the dogs, wake up with fleas."

"Here today, gone tomorrow."

"Life is not art."

"Art is not religion."

"Look before you leap."

"Floss after every meal."

"Love your parents."

"Love yourself."

"If you've got it, flaunt it."

"Knock on wood."

"Read the classics."

"Stay in school."

"Don't spit into the wind."

"Don't pee in the sea."

"Eat your vegetables."

"Eat the rich."

"Have faith."

"Take the money and run."

"Life's a bitch."

"Better than a kick in the ass."

"Life goes on."

"Be prepared."

"Keep your chin up."

"Don't let the bastards bring you down."

"Sit on my happy face."

It is also clear from this ignoble display that the gods are not team players.

Aphrodite, goddess of desire, whose head spins 360 degrees trying to keep up with the volley of conflicting and ridiculous plans, epithets, curses, floats above the

assembly and holds out a hand to silence her associates. It is a peek, however, up the lovely goddess's infamous embroidered girdle that silences the group. Aphrodite is no fool. She knows how to play a crowd. When she is certain she has everyone's undivided attention, she makes a speech, a declaration, a decree:

"Despite our shameful lack of concord, or perhaps because of it," she begins, "we, my friends and family, have brought this child, namesake of Minos' hapless daughter, to the limits of her knowledge and imagination, and to the very edge of death, where she now lies." The gods glance down at Ariadne, inert on the rock. "Should she survive our artless scheming, I suggest that from this moment on we let her decide and create her own destiny. It is time to set her free."

The vote is close. A slim majority ululates in agreement with Aphrodite, while the losers shrug and stomp off, a few stars going out with every step.

The shackles of Ariadne's fate fall onto the rock with a clang, then slip into the sea with a splash, rousing her from her trance. As she wipes the sleep from her eyes, she notices the splotches of dried blood on her fingertips and dips her hands into the sea, the sting of the salt sealing all her superficial wounds. She stretches like a cat on all fours, her shoulders and upper back arching away from the rock. She takes a deep breath, fills her lungs with the cool sea air. As she wakes up incrementally, a slow diffusion of consciousness filling her head with every passing moment, she feels an overwhelming sense of weightlessness and believes that if she stepped off the rock, she could walk on water, walk all the way to the neighbouring island whose blinking lights she can see in the distance. For the first time since she arrived on Nysas, she feels she has the strength to leave.

It was time to go back, not to Athens, but to Montreal. Home, where she understands the underpinnings, the subtext and the rules. She clicks the heels of her bare feet in a dreamy attempt to make it instantly happen, but nothing comes of it.

Perhaps Karina can go with her and they can share an apartment downtown, near the mountain, the cafés, near all the things she already knows and will be happy to return to, things she will never take for granted again. Petros can visit, and they will all go skiing at Mont Tremblant. How she misses skiing. On very hot nights she still dreams she is winding down those pure white slopes, her long hair streaming behind her like a pirate flag. There is nothing more liberating than taking a mountain from the top, racing all the way to the bottom, then being whisked back up on the lift to do it again. Greeks only know its opposite: pushing boulders uphill, the tumble down an eternal tragedy. That is the difference between the old world and the new, she decides. The new world has less baggage—that's its advantage. There is room to make up new ways of being . You are not condemned to repeat the same mistakes forever, to travel along the same rut like a prisoner of fate—someone else's, not even your own.

She stands up, takes a deep breath and feels renewed, reborn. It is finally over. She will go back to her room and pack all her belongings, throw out the things she no longer wants to remember, things from her past life like the broken shoelace, and that piece of crumpled cigarette paper with the phone number scrawled on it—why didn't she get rid of that earlier? Those worthless souvenirs that she's treasured more than her own well-being. And then she will march into The Scat Club and tell Thanasis to fuck right off, the bastard, or even better, to go fuck Alikí. Now there's a fitting punishment. It will feel so, so good to finally let him have it. She doesn't need him anymore, she doesn't need any...

Then she remembers. First a snippet, then a sketch, then a whole shadowy scene. She falls to her knees on the rock, trying to work out what happened, or whether anything happened at all. She begins to cry and she can't catch her breath. She strains and strains but she isn't sure what's taken place; it is all messed up in her head, and the order of things doesn't make sense. She rests her forehead in her hands, massaging her temples with her thumbs to try and help herself think. She dips her feet into the water

and is stung instantly on the ankle by a lurking jellyfish. She yelps and quickly tucks her feet back under her and tries to rub away the pain of the sting. The moon disappears suddenly, obscured by a cloud, its glow smothered by the black gasses travelling together like a pack of wild dogs. She wants to scream out over the calm water for all to hear her confession, as if by admission alone she will be acquitted of her crime. But all that emerges from her throat is a whisper, and hardly even that, a susurration. "He is dead," she mouths. "My god, I killed him."

56.

The gun in Ariadne's hand, in Yannis' belly, the little gold gun, its metal warmed like five star brandy in a snifter, small enough to conceal in Ariadne's joined palms. A perfect fit, her fingers wrap around the gun as if it were a penis, a frond sprouted from her body that has always been there but has only now been discovered.

Moments ago (or was it hours?) Ariadne sat motionless next to Yannis, the gun still pressed into her side. She wept quietly over the visions from her past that had sprung to life, independent of her imagination, in her small dusty room, and were tweaking and taunting her, trying to drag her into an irreality from which she would be powerless to escape. She considered pulling the trigger herself as a distraction from the waves of gnawing pain brought on by memory, relived in full, gaining strength in hindsight instead of waning. The sharp bite of a bullet could hardly be worse. It might even be a relief. But then she heard Kyr Georgis' footsteps outside her door, heard him go into the bathroom. She listened anxiously to the ongoing conversation he had with his prick as urine gushed into the bowl, splashed around the sides. "Come on, old mule," he coaxed. "That's a good boy."

She prayed to whatever deities had yet to forsake her that Kyr Georgis would feel compelled to peek into her room (come on old mule), as he had done so many times before, to walk in with his hands buried in his filthy trousers and to stand above her bed staring. She had him caught lurking in the dark one night when she was in bed with Rut. He'd quickly turned his back to them, pretending to fix the door knob, then apologized and left, quietly pulling the door shut behind him. He had never been back, or at least she hadn't caught him again. But now as she prayed directly to his perversion, she heard him walk past her door whistling, and then go down the stairs. Kyr Georgis had other plans tonight, with Kyria Marigoula. An exchange of goat's cheese for cookies—or so they called it. How Kyr Georgis loved those cookies.

Yannis murmured and shifted his weight. Ariadne didn't believe he was really asleep, just lying in wait for her to make a move so he could justify shooting her. The only sounds in her room were her breathing and her heart beating to the rhythm of a long-forgotten song echoing in her brain:

Kill me please
so we will both
be spared.

But Yannis is unconscious and has not yet realized as his teeth grind him into deeper sleep that he has relaxed his fingers and handed the gun to Ariadne, dropped it into her lap. At first Ariadne thinks it's another trick, and refuses to touch it until a deep snort assures her he is far gone, fixed for the rest of the night. Her hands shake as she picks up the gun, stands up and aims it at his head, between his eyes. She stands there over him for a few minutes and then tries another position, more intimate. She climbs onto the bed, straddles him, then fully lays her body on top of his, resting her head in the bony hollow of his shoulder. She presses the gun between their bodies, then blows in his ear. She licks its outer ridge and the lobe, feeling the tiny nub where an earring hole has healed over, she bites his cheek gently, then kisses his mouth, pushing her tongue between his lips, which part involuntarily. She can feel his cock hardening,

pushing against her pelvis, and she pushes back with the gun, kissing him harder and biting his lips until they bleed, the taste of his blood infusing her with confidence. In his sleep he curses and reaches out, wrapping his hands around her throat, hooking his thumb to her windpipe. She just smiles at him, a benevolent smile, and shoves the gun deeper into his belly. Now he wakes up fully, enraged. "What the fuck," he dares to pronounce, and then tries to push her off of him but does not succeed.

"What should I do, Yannaki," she innocently inquires, "to the man who has ruined my life, Yannaki? Tell me, my love, tell me what to do." She smiles sweetly, kisses his forehead. The clerk at the gun shop would approve of the irony.

"It was a joke," Yannis sputters, then tries to laugh. "I just wanted to see what you would do. Give it back. Give me the gun, my sweet. It's not even loaded." He holds out his hand and laughs again, but she is not convinced.

"Oh no? Then the joke's on me." She fingers the trigger. It gives like a loose tooth. "You have nothing to fear, *matia mou*—my eyes."

Yannis' bloodshot eyes widen and he breathes heavily. He does not look like a man with nothing to fear. "Please don't," he whispers desperately. "Please, I beg you, Medea."

A dead silence rises between them, then falls to the floor and shatters.

Ariadne felt the explosion of the bullet in his belly as if it had punctured her own. She felt his warm blood soak the front of her T-shirt, the last shiver of his death rattle in her own bones. She lay there on top of him for a long while, staring into his open eyes, trying to figure out where he had gone—heaven or hell? She wasn't sure which she wished upon him, possibly neither. She didn't feel much about the whole situation. She now understood the logic of animals who instantly turn away from fallen members of their pack, or alternately feast upon them with no sign of sentimentality. It was that they no longer recognized them. It had, she decided, something to do with the soul.

As she stared at Yannis' face, she recalled the first morning she found him in her bed and didn't know who he was. This felt the same, but now all she had to do was forget rather than remember. She lifted herself carefully off the body and went into the bathroom. She turned on the shower tap, but the last drops of water in the pipes fizzled at the shower head then retreated into the rust. She peeled off her bloody clothes and poured water over her head out of the bottles surrounding the toilet. The lukewarm water carved rivers and trails through the drying blood on her torso, like the grounds in an overturned coffee cup. She wondered who could read her future as she traced along the curving lines with her finger, then painted an "A" onto the surface, skintone on a red backdrop.

She went back into her room and grabbed blindly for something to throw over her nakedness. She pulled her red velvet dress over her head and stopped for a moment, intrigued by how empty the room felt, like no one had inhabited it for the last 1000 years. She didn't notice the body as she reached over the bed and added a diagonal slash across the last four chalkmarks on her grey wall. She made her way down the stairs barefoot, holding up the sides of the skirt and placing one foot before the other as if she were descending from a horse-drawn carriage. Heading for the village gates, she was surprised by how few people she encountered. Where was everyone, she wondered, then immediately forgot. There was a buzzing in her ears, a ringing as if someone was thinking of her, but she couldn't imagine who it might be. Once outside the gates, she briefly turned her head towards the village and saw flames shooting towards the sky, beautiful, blue-orange light illuminating the night like a backwards eclipse. She had a vague memory of seeing something like this before, but she wasn't sure where or when. As she stared at the sky, mesmerized by the flames, it occurred to her that Yannis was in hell and that satisfied her. She would never waste any time thinking about it again. She turned her back on the spectacle and, stepping carefully around

broken glass and other detritus, followed the geometric patterns whitewashed onto the grey stone of the donkey track all the way to the port.

Epilogue

It is April on Nysas and the sun shines brightly, revitalized after an exceptionally harsh winter, though there is still a nip in the wind. "*Ilios me dontia*—the sun has teeth," the villagers like to say: It smiles at you through your windows while you are safely indoors, then sinks its fangs into your flesh when you step outside to greet it, gorging itself on your blood. This is what gives its cheeks their rosy, April glow.

Nysas' streets were particularly quiet this past winter due to relentless, heavy rains, which washed away the last traces of the geometric shapes the villagers normally retouched every Tuesday and Saturday. There was no point in painting circles, squares or triangles on stone paths that never had a chance to dry. Then in January, most surprisingly, it snowed. Not the kind of snow that sticks to the ground for days, but the type that falls light and soft into a shimmering and almost translucent layer before vanishing. Nysas' children, kept home from school during the "storm," stared through their windows at the falling flakes in wonderment, and one little boy asked his mother if God was taking a bath, since soap suds were floating down from the sky. The children were not the only ones bewildered by the unusual weather; there was no one alive on the island who remembered the last time it snowed.

Whether the snowstorm was a miracle or a bad omen was debated amongst the villagers at the one *kafenion* that remained open throughout the winter, in the line up at the bakery, where women entrusted roasters full of meat and potatoes to the baker to cook in his giant oven, and in *Agia Irini*, where light and soft flakes fell onto the heads of the faithful through the hole in the roof caused by the terrible fire the summer before.

There is still no consensus over what started the blaze. The two most popular theories are as different from one another as summer and winter on the island. The more practical-minded believed that one of the dozens of short, white candles, lit by the

parishioners as wishes, thanks and remembrances of their dead, tipped over. This, they alleged, produced a domino effect that eventually knocked a larger candle at the end of the row onto the podium that held the framed icon of the Blessed Virgin and Son, their faces blurred behind a piece of glass covered in dried lip prints. That the wooden podium is charred black and the hole in the roof is right above it bodes well for this theory.

A second faction believed that the fire was an act of God, a third degree purification by flame and a warning to the villagers that if they didn't clean up their acts soon, their island would bear the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Some promised the charred Virgin that from now on they would avoid tourists altogether, while others would only go so far as to deny them their marital beds during high season. A person, after all, still had to eat. This debate raged on throughout the winter, not only unresolved but rekindled whenever interest in it seemed to wane, since there is very little to distract the villagers after the tourists have gone.

The other favourite topic of conversation was the murder, if indeed there was a murder since no arrests were made and a body was never found. Although no one knew the whole story, everyone seemed to know something about it, except for the police, who knew absolutely nothing. The story of the murder grew over the winter, a patchwork quilt of gossip, supposition and fabrication that covered Nysas like a blanket of snow.

Old Man Socrates let a beard grow over the winter to protect his cheeks from the winds that sliced through the island's narrow streets, removing hats, shawls and sometimes entire heads from those who did not know better than to venture outside. Between the beard and the dark blue sailor's cap he pulled down over his eyebrows, Socrates looked like an old salt. His friends at the barber shop started calling him *kapetanyos*, a nickname he did not discourage since he was not even *kapetanyos* of his own home. He still visited the barber shop at least once a week, if only out of habit and

the need to get away from his wife, Kyria Roula. Instead of the regular shave, the barber pulled a comb through the scruffy, crumb-laden grey mess that hung like dried seaweed from Socrates' chin. Business was slow during the winter and the barber did what he could to make a few extra drachmas and, more importantly, to pass the time. On days he felt creative he used wax to create thumb-sized, perfect curls at the ends of moustaches, swirl beards into elegant tornadoes.

As Socrates, under the ministrations of the barber, became Salvador Dali caught in the eye of a twister, he told the other men, some with braids hanging off their chins, others with sideburns that swooped down into handlebar moustaches, what he had heard about the murder. "She shot his dick right off, poor bastard." He stretched his index finger and thumb into a gun, pointed it at his crotch and made a popping sound with his mouth. "Left a hole where his dick used to be." He used the extended finger to scratch himself consolingly. The waxed, the braided, the combed, nodded grimly in unison. One or two clicked their tongues in disbelief.

"Turned into a woman, a bleeding hole. Better dead than a woman. Better off dead."

The men did not ask Socrates where he got his information. His conclusion rang true enough that they felt no need to question the rest of the story, its source, or the ghastly description of the bloody hole. Had Socrates seen the body? As far as they knew, no body had been found, not even on the next island where so much of Nysas' waste washed ashore. And if Socrates had seen the body, they would rather not know. There were some things better left in the realm of the possible.

"What is the world coming to?" the barber asked rhetorically as he held a mirror in front of Socrates' face. "Now the fish are chasing the cats." This too elicited nods and tight-lipped assent.

Socrates handed the barber a few coins and slapped him on the back. He pulled his dark blue sailor's cap down over his eyebrows and stepped outside to confront the

cutting wind which, hard as it tried, could not cut off the hardened waxed curls in Socrates' moustache, the swirl in his beard, though it did manage to cut off the circulation in his fingertips, since his hands were not protected by gloves.

Kyria Marigoula and the baker came to an agreement over the winter. There were too few people left on the island to compete over cookies, so the baker offered to buy Kyria Marigoula's sweets and sell them in his shop. In any case, he was far too busy to turn out the small batches of *koulouria*, *melomacaronas*, and *kourambiedes* himself, what with all the village women bringing him their chickens, goats and legs of lamb to roast. He had to watch over the various pans of meat with the careful eye of a master chef, simultaneously covering, uncovering, turning over and basting according to his customer's precise directions or he would never hear the end of it. And he had to admit that the old woman's cookies were far better than his—blessed hands, the other women had told him, and they were right.

Kyria Marigoula's oven was always on, keeping her little house toasty and sweet-smelling throughout the harsh winter. She hardly even noticed when the snow came down outside her window since there were constant flurries of powdered sugar from her *kourambiedes* floating inside her house, leaving a thin layer of white dust on all the floors, all the surfaces. The small room off the kitchen where she kept her surrogate children all summer was turned into a storage room for her cookies. They sat on large trays on the single metal-framed bed, on the night table, and on the wooden shelves that were erected next to the giant crucifix by Kyr Georgis in exchange for several favours. Kyria Marigoula is convinced that it is the presence of the cross that makes her cookies so sublime. She has even moved the little kitchen shrine with the icons and the votive candle into the sweet room. Now that she's in business, she needs all the help she can get.

The baker promised to double, then triple his order next summer as more and more *xeni* came to the island and his shop. This would not only mean more money for her, but that her days as a landlady, a surrogate mother to the lost children of the world, were over. She would no longer have to chase after tourists, rumbling like a toy car, nor would she have to stand guard in her kitchen all night to make sure her house remained free of sin. This was a great relief, though a small part of her would miss the company. There were always two or three visitors every summer who she came to like, who she pampered because it gave her pleasure, and who made up for the rest of the animals that passed through her kitchen and her heart. Some of these favoured visitors sent her picture postcards from their countries with a few words scrawled on the back in languages that Kyria Marigoula could not read; she could barely read Greek let alone German, English or Dutch. She pinned the cards onto her bed post like vivid dreams of lands where she'd never been.

The most recent card she'd received was from Canada ("KA-NA-THA," she pronounced the block letters out loud.). The picture showed an outdoor scene, a frozen lake swarming with bundled up people who seemed to have knives on their feet. She thought the card must have been sent by that nice boy who'd brought her flowers, though she couldn't recall his name. He was the last of the good guests she'd had the previous summer, and his departure seemed to trigger all the bad luck that followed. Wasn't it on the day after he left that the lights went out, the church caught fire, all those souls drowned at Anthemusa, and she saw the ghost?

As Kyria Marigoula made her way up the path towards *Agia Irini*, carrying a bucket to help douse the blaze and drenching her feet with the water that sloshed over it sides, she shivered as if a cold wind had passed right through her. It was then that she saw the apparition. She stared at the figure of a young woman, her face pale as a winter moon. She was wearing a red velvet dress, a dress from another century—Kyria Marigoula's great-grandmother's or even further back—and she seemed to float a few

inches above the ground, her bare feet gliding through the air of that strange night as if attached to blades. Kyria Marigoula crossed herself as the figure slipped past the other villagers on their way to the church, who didn't notice her at all in their panic to put out the fire.

It wasn't until a few days later, when the whispering about the murder reached Kyria Marigoula's ears, that she put two and two together. The young woman must have been the victim, and though no body had been found yet, Kyria Marigoula had seen the passing spirit on its way, she hoped, to heaven. She didn't know what to think when the baker told her that the victim was supposedly a man, so she kept her encounter with the ghost woman to herself. Nor did she tell anyone that the spirit had a face Kyria Marigoula had seen before, in the room where she now kept cookies.

When the season finally ended, Kyr Georgis hauled the mattresses out of the cheese room, and the downstairs apartment reverted to its former function. In place of Karina and Petros were barrels filled with feta cheese bobbing in salty water, giant wheels of *kaseri* tucked in the alcove where Karina had slept, and tubs of butter lined up against the walls. In summer, the thick walls and absence of windows kept the cheese room naturally cool—a dark oasis from the hubris of the sun. In winter, the room became frigid and even on days when the sun made an appearance over the island, Kyr Georgis could see his sour breath. This was the ideal environment for lodging his cheeses, which were much better company and far more reliable than his tenants. If he was peckish before suppertime he could stop into the cheese room, where he was always welcome. As long as he had his cheese he would never go hungry. It was fortunate, he often thought, that he had a business besides renting out his two spare rooms, since he could never tell when those bums he took in would run out on him without paying their rent, let alone living up to their full agreement.

After the night of the fire last summer, both sluts he'd rented to, the upstairs slut and the downstairs one, disappeared without a trace. If they hadn't left behind their things—tattered books, worn-down lipsticks, and suitcases filled with clothing either too small or too big for his Fofu—you could forget that they were ever there. Except for the mess the upstairs cunt left him to clean up; ruined the mattress, bled all over it like a stuck goat. Kyr Georgis instructed Fofu to rinse out the mattress under the shower, but when it wouldn't stop bleeding he took it out to his field and burned it. He'd heard something about a murder when he dropped in at the *kafenion*. Someone even said that it took place under Kyr Georgis' roof, but the goat herd dismissed these rumours as nonsense. He knew the difference between a man's blood and woman's.

Blood does not bother Kyr Georgis in the least; not only has he been to war, he sticks his goats all the time and even enjoys the warmth of their fresh blood on his hands on cool mornings. But woman's blood is disgusting, tainted by original sin, not pure like the blood of war, of slaughter. The Greek church forbids women to enter when they are bleeding, the barber says he can smell it in their hair, and Kyr Georgis would completely ignore his daughter's monthly affliction if he weren't so intent on keeping track of her purity. Hopefully Fofu would soon stop bleeding altogether and would produce an army of sons trained to slaughter goats or enemies in war.

While the downstairs apartment became a temporary repository for cheese, the upstairs apartment was turned into a permanent residence for Fofu and her new husband, Petros. It was important that families stayed together, Kyr Georgis insisted, and when the sons started coming, the couple would be glad to have all that milk and cheese close by. When Kyr Georgis caught them rutting like goats in the downstairs bathroom on the night of the fire, he gave the boy a choice—gelding or marriage—and he picked the right one. Fofu didn't protest, not to Kyr Georgis, anyway. Petros is now the recipient of all of Fofu's pent up frustrations, desires, demands, jealousies and entitlements, stored up during the years she'd lived with her dagger-wielding father.

Petros requested that the cheese room be part of Fofó's dowry instead of the upstairs apartment, but Kyr Georgis would hear nothing of it. The cheese room, he said, belonged to the cheese. What he didn't tell his son-in-law is that he liked to go in there, bundled up against the cold, and just breathe in the pungent odour until he was dizzy, until he found himself talking earnestly about his life and his problems to the barrels of feta, the wheels of *kaseri*, the tubs of butter, or that sometimes they talked back. The cheese contends that Petros knows something about the murder and the disappearance of his girlfriends, but whenever Kyr Georgis brings up the subject, his son-in-law just shrugs.

How did Petros end up the son-in-law of the Peeping Tom goat herd with the dagger in his boot, and the husband of the no-longer-oppressed Fofó? Petros goes over the events that took place last summer on a daily basis, searching for the fork in the road that he missed, the detour that might have led him down another path—any path other than the dead end where Fofó's bed rests. But all contemplation leads him back to it, like the roads to Rome. The gods, he decides, are playing tricks on him. They must hate him. They must have set him up. Fofó turns over, elbows him in the ribs and glares, and Petros realizes he is talking to himself out loud again.

On the day of the blackout, the fire, the murder (Petros is the one person on Nysas who does indeed know something, but he's not talking), before the lights went out and the flames shot into the firmament, scorching the clouds and the hems of goddess' skirts, Petros rushed home from the bus stop, his bladder bursting from the three frothy iced-coffees he'd guzzled at the Way Out Café. He didn't bother knocking because the bathroom's wooden door was half-open, but when he pushed it in it smacked Fofó on her plump and pasty butt. What was Fofó doing in the downstairs bathroom—his bathroom—anyway? Petros didn't ask and Fofó offered no explanations as she stood under the trickle of water, her mouth hanging open. Petros stood there long enough to

take her apart—her cantaloupe breasts from her face, her acreage of pubic hair from the legs it was spreading on to—before he stepped over the threshold and shut the door behind him. It is truly unfortunate that he hadn't thought to lock it.

Petros nods to himself, head slightly tilting to the side and moving up and down slowly. What can you do? Life is like that.

There were a lot of questions over the winter about Karina and Ariadne, mostly insinuations that Petros was screwing both of them. His former roommates were collectively referred to as "the harem." "Poor *malaka* abandoned by his whole harem," the village's young men called out, then bleated like goats as Petros walked by them, staring at his feet and following the path's white lines all the way home. Petros did not bother confirming nor dispelling the rumour because he knew it irritated Fofo. And she never asked him what he knew about the harem's disappearance; Fofo had her own ideas which she kept to herself. She never told her husband about the envelope that arrived from Canada containing a long letter written in English, which Fofo could not read, and a strip of tiny photos of two women she recognized as Ariadne and Karina. Fofo considered showing the letter to one of the villagers who could translate, but her jealousy far surpassed her curiosity. She fed each page of the letter and the strip of photos to her father's largest goat, Melquiades. Goats will eat anything. Silk, velvet, tin, garbage, jealousy, secrets. So Petros will never learn that his friends made it to the next island in a small, painted caique with a sputtering motor that awaited them on the shore like a getaway gift from the gods. Or that they sailed from there to Piraeus, then flew directly to Montreal, where they posed for the photographs folded into the letter.

The series of five black and white photographs, the size of postage stamps, is cut out of the top row of a contact sheet. Ariadne and Karina are sitting side by side on a park bench on Mount Royal, though the location could not be determined by looking at the photos, since the photographer has tightly framed the girls' faces to the exclusion of

everything else around them. The only clue that these photos were taken outside is a wisp of hair that flutters across Ariadne's face in each of the shots, tickling her nose and making it twitch, but that's not why she's smiling.

If the strip of photos with its perforated edges was run through a projector, the following exchange would take place in the blink of an eye:

In the first shot the women are staring straight into the camera, grinning slightly, if somewhat self-consciously. In the second, Ariadne is still looking out of the photo, whereas Karina is in profile and is whispering something into Ariadne's ear, possibly something snide about the photographer who has cornered them on this sunny afternoon when their only intention was to sit on the park bench and watch Montreal's pretty boys walk by. In photo three Ariadne has turned her face towards Karina, as if replying to her friend's remarks, perhaps commenting upon how lucky they are to speak Greek since this allows them to say anything they want to about the pesky photographer without his understanding. They call him *malaka*, *xenerotos*, *bufo* while pretending to flirt, and he blows them a kiss and tells them they're lovely. Maybe he even asks them back to his studio to look at his bulging "portfolio" and this is the reason that in the fourth photo both women's faces are contorted with laughter, laughter so raucous and genuine and uncontrollable that someone looking at the photograph for long enough would swear he could hear it, would be infected by it, and would find himself chuckling. It is best not be on public transit when looking at such a photo. The final photograph in the sequence shows Ariadne and Karina staring straight ahead again, but gone are the self-conscious grins of the first shot. Though they have regained their composure, their cheeks are still flushed from their laughter, and their eyes sparkle from the tears that sprang like a light shower on a hot summer day, the kind of meteorological moodiness that turns the sky slate grey and then streaks a rainbow across it for effect. If the photographer pulled his camera back, a few smudges of red, purple and deep blue might be visible against the grey background of the black and white photo.

But Petros will never gaze upon these photos, will never see how happy both Karina and Ariadne seem. He has seen happiness in Karina's face before, but he would not believe just how happy Ariadne can look. He would realize that every instance he mistook for her happiness on Nysas was just a momentary absence of pain, a temporary amnesia. In these photos, taken so soon after her ordeal, Ariadne appears cured of all pain, reborn and fresh, as if she does not yet know that pain exists in the world or the extent of it she might have to endure. This is both an illusion and a truth. But what the photos do confirm is that there is life after death.

Unfortunately, the final images Petros is left with are lit not by a rainbow but by an orange moon. He recalls them like a lucid dream where he is watching his own actions from a distance, but is powerless to intervene. It is dark and strangely silent, despite the high-pitched hysteria of grannies, the braying of donkeys being beaten with sticks and switches, and the panicked ringing of bells in the church that is burning down. Petros sees two figures, himself and Karina, carrying an oblong bundle wrapped in a grey blanket. The bundle looks heavy and they struggle to keep their balance and to keep it from dragging against the ground. Once or twice they are forced to put it down, but only for a moment. This task must be completed before the fire is extinguished, before some semblance of order is restored.

Petros and Karina do not speak as they carry the bundle uphill to a spot favoured by lovers, suicides and angry gods. Speaking would make the task harder, the bundle heavier, and they might risk waking up from this dream state where everything has slowed down, every step is critical, and every action performed by instinct instead of logic. Petros does not have the opportunity to tell Karina about being caught in the act by Kyr Georgis or the nature of his punishment. Karina doesn't tell him what happened, where Ariadne is or what they will do next, and Petros does not ask. Karina would have no definite answers to any of these questions, since even the directions to

the flat rock where she left Ariadne unconscious cannot be explained, only followed. At the moment all that matters is the uphill trek and the bundle swinging between them as if they were rocking it to sleep.

After the bundle is unceremoniously cast off the cliff and the sea opens its mouth to swallow it like a large fish devouring a smaller one, Karina tosses in a small, gold object, a wedding ring returned to Poseidon. As it falls it glints one final time in the light of the orange moon before sinking tracelessly beneath the black waves.

They do not speak of what they have just done as they turn away from the cliff and head back towards the village. But their pace steadily increases and soon they are running as if they cannot get away from the cliff fast enough. As if distance can erase action. When they reach the path to Kyr Georgis' house, Karina hugs Petros and tells him that she and Ariadne are leaving right away, before the questions begin, and if he has any money he should spare it now. Petros gives her all the money he has in his wallet and doesn't ask where they are going or how. Again, he forgets to tell her about Kyr Georgis and Fofu, because momentarily he has forgotten, too. Otherwise why wouldn't he ask her to take him with them? (This, Petros realizes, is where he made his second major mistake.) Then again, Karina did not ask him to come along.

When he wakes up from the dream, the fire has been put out, the bloody mattress has been burned, and Petros is lying next to Fofu in the room where Ariadne ceased to exist as a person and became a character in a story repeated so often, and in so many variations, that even he is unsure of whether anything at all happened that night, let alone with his participation, or whether the murder is just another one of those tall tales the villagers tell to amuse themselves over the winter.

By April Father Theodoros' church has been restored to its former glory. All work has been completed on *Agia Irini* except for the newly-painted, life-sized icons on the walls whose faces have not yet been filled in, allowing a number of the most wicked

grannies to picture their own wrinkled and hairy-moled mugs sprouting from the saintly bodies. The priest has his own thoughts about what happened last August when the roof was blown off the House of the Lord. All winter as his parishioners huddled together in the scorched pews, Father Theodoros gave his sermons while being pelted with rain, hail and, most absurdly, snow. He spoke of the fire and the inclement weather as tests of faith, and assured the villagers that their songs, their devotions would reach God's ears expeditiously now that a direct path had opened up between where they sat and heaven. Father Theodoros pointed at the white birds that liked to perch on the edges of the hole in the roof and peer down into his church. "These are God's messengers," he announced to the congregation in a moment of divine inspiration. "They will carry your fondest wishes and your deepest sorrows on their downy wings right into His bosom." As he passed the basket lined in red velvet, he warned the ladies in black to watch their tongues in God's presence and to ignore the white blotches raining down from His gaggle onto their best Sunday hats and coats. "Consider yourselves very lucky," he advised, "that you've been given receipts for your prayers."

In private, however, Father Theodoros believed that the fire at *Agia Irini* was punishment from God for the depravity on Nysas, which seemed to get worse with every passing season, culminating in the murder that everyone chattered about until he stepped into the room. Though there was no material evidence that a killing had taken place, it nonetheless disturbed the priest that the villagers took so much pleasure in talking about it, as if it were something they had seen on television, re-inventing and embellishing the possible scenarios every day. Had they all forgotten that *Thou Shall Not Kill* was one of the gravest Commandments, right up there with the one about coveting your neighbour's wife? Obviously, the invasion of naked Swedes and rutting Italians had, over time, eroded the morals of his flock. If you danced the *tsifteteli* with the devil, you were bound to get your toes stepped on, mangled. And stronger shoes would not solve the problem. The season was about to begin again, and for the next six

months an endless stream of foreign devils would be getting on and off the ferries that stopped in Nysas' port, tempting the villagers with the debaucheries of hell, then carrying away their souls. There wasn't much Father Theodoros could do about it; he knew that evil had its own charm and momentum.

But maybe this year would be different. The fire, perhaps, was the necessary evil that would allow Nysas to start over, fresh and clean, just as the sea regained its vigour, its youth over the winter months when it was left in peace. Wasn't it possible for the villagers to influence the ways of the visitors instead of the visitors exerting such intense influence on the villagers? Anything was possible when God was on your side. And God is on Father Theodoros' side; he has sent him a sign, though the priest has kept it to himself. He does not want to be accused of immodesty, or worse.

On the night his church burned and the bells rang themselves, crying out for help, Father Theodoros looked out over the sea from the highest point on the island and saw a dark figure with flames bursting out of its back like wings. The figure was running across the surface of the water towards the next island hand in hand with a second figure dressed in bridal white, her wreath and trail on fire. The priest crossed himself and silently thanked God for showing him the sign, for banishing the demon and his wife from Nysas and saving Father Theodoros the trouble of having to do it himself. He knew at that moment that all would be well, despite the fire, or because of it. He and his fellow Nysians would escape *katara*—eternal damnation. They had been spared. As for the fate of the next island, the demon was now their problem. Father Theodoros could not save the whole world.

The priest hears the horn of an approaching ferry. He mounts his donkey sidesaddle and rides towards the port, a phial of holy water attached to his belt like a gun. The *Ariadne* is docking for the first time this season and its passengers include Thanasis and his wife Soula, Alik, a number of Perms, both veteran and virgin, and a

handful of early tourists intent on beating the rush. The old ladies in their flowered housedresses are bunched up on the dock, primed to snare their first customers, to begin the season with good luck. They open up a path for Father Theodoros as his donkey stumbles towards the gangplank. He lifts his robes like a lady as he dismounts just in time to sprinkle holy water on the first passengers off the ferry. The tourists, mildly seasick from the twelve hour journey from Athens to Nysas over rough seas, misunderstand the priest's blessing, and wipe the drops from their cheeks like spit.



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